



Have you considered a switch to wet-cleaning?

Dry cleaners

Are you still cleaning with that same old solvent? Perhaps you should try the oldest solvent of all—water. A dry-cleaning establishment in Wichita has tried water, and is very happy with the results.

Lee's Cleaners story

Several years ago Lee's Cleaners in Wichita purchased an Aquatex washing machine and dryer. Over time, this dry cleaner moved away from perc use and slowly increased the percentage of clothes wet cleaned. It did not take long after switching cleaning methods for the majority of their business to be wet cleaning. Clothes that could not be wet cleaned were cleaned with perc.

Jodi, the cleaning technician at Lee's Cleaners, preferred wet cleaning for suedes and leathers, noting that those garments got much cleaner with water than with perc. She did have to do some stretching of the leather after cleaning.

Men's suit jackets were also a problem in the aqueous machine because of the stretching required afterward. However, Jodi liked wet cleaning for slacks, wedding gowns, and fancy garments with beads or sequins. That's because perc causes swelling of fibers, which can weaken the attachment of beads or sequins.

Jodi did not use wet cleaning on some fabrics, including ramie and 100 percent wool, but she did use it on blends of up to about 50 percent wool. She found that wet cleaning worked well



Lee's Cleaners uses the Aquatex system.

for Dacron, silk, rayon, and polyester. Typically, however, lined items were stretched.

Lee's wet-cleaning machine used only cold water. With specialized wet-cleaning detergents more readily available, Lee's used them and credited these specialized products for the increased wet cleaning at his facility. To avoid damage to delicate fabrics, garments were turned inside out and kept closed, using either the garment's fasteners (buttons or zipper) or safety pins. The outside of the fabric should not contact the rotating chamber of the washing machine.

Wet-cleaning advantages include less spotting and better smelling garments. According to Lee Gieseke, owner of Lee's Cleaners, "Customers notice that the clothes do NOT have a chemical smell and that the clothes are cleaner than if cleaned with a solvent." Customers with asthma especially appreciate the lack of odor from wet-cleaned clothes. Another advantage is that multiple programming options are available with the Aquatex machine, allowing gentle cleaning.

Items sometimes just don't come clean in perc solvent. For instance, a robe with a milk stain was brought in for dry cleaning. The traditional solvent (perc) did not get the stain out, but when the robe was wet cleaned, the stain came out.

Gieseke said that although soaps and finishing agents are more expensive for wet cleaning, it is economical because there are no hazardous waste disposal costs. Gieseke anticipated continued use of both perc and wet cleaning methods because of the variety of available fabrics and fabric blends. As consumers become better educated on professional "dry" cleaning, they may prefer professional "wet" cleaning.

Turn this page over to learn more about the wet-cleaning process, pros and cons, as well as other new alternative cleaning processes.



Wet cleaning often requires more pressing.

Why wet clean?

Professional wet cleaning is an increasingly popular service offered by professional cleaners all over the country. With specialized equipment, skills and training, wet cleaning safely cleans clothes in water instead of a chemical solvent. This

process leaves some garments cleaner, better smelling and can save your business hundreds of dollars in avoided hazardous waste and liability costs!

Comparison criteria	Advantages	Disadvantages
Effects on clothes	No chemical smell Whiter whites Water-based stains easier to remove	Can shrink some garments Can cause color change Grease stains more difficult to remove
Environmental effects	Decreased regulations and liabilities related to hazardous waste, air pollution, and water and soil contamination	Increased water use
Cost	Significant cost savings in avoided hazardous waste disposal and liability expenses Equipment investment less	Increased labor expenses in pressing and finishing
Types of clothes	Cotton, wool, silk, leather, suede, wedding gowns, highly-decorated beads and sequins	Concerns with some acetate linings, antique satin, gabardine, and highly-structured garments
Other	Ability to obtain new business and less landlord restrictions	

Are there any alternatives to perc?

Although petroleum solvent use and wet cleaning are some of the most popular perc dry-cleaning alternatives, several other technologies exist such as liquid carbon dioxide, silicone-based solvent (e.g., GreenEarth®), and propylene glycol ethers (e.g., Rynex 3®), among others. Some of the information in the table above was adopted for this document with permission from the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT). Read more about wet cleaning and the types of wet-cleaning



equipment at www.cnt.org/wetcleaning. Also, check out our November 2012 fact sheet titled “Comparison of wet-cleaning and dry-cleaning methods” available on our website at www.sbeap.org along with other dry-cleaner resources.

Where can I get more information?

The Kansas Small Business Environmental Assistance Program (SBEAP) operates a toll-free technical hotline you can call for additional assistance. In addition, as a service to small businesses in Kansas, SBEAP can visit your facility to review current control technologies and identify pollution prevention opportunities. Contact SBEAP at 800-578-8898 or sbeap@ksu.edu.

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