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Technical Bulletin

November 2014 Issue TB13

Advice For Professional Curtain Cleaners

SHRINKAGE

Curtain fabric is unavoidably stretched during the weaving process as tension is necessary on the warp yarns, which run from the top to the bottom of the fabric that is why shrinkage almost always occurs in the length on finished curtains.

The British and European Standard for curtains allows for up to 3% relaxation on curtain fabrics, to compensate for this, manufacturers will allow for extra material in the hem. However, this extra material is very often of no practical use by the time the customer wants the curtains cleaned as there is often a wear line on the hem of full length curtains which would show visibly if the curtains were lengthened.

Some manufacturers will pre-shrink their fabric before it is sent to be made up into curtain material, but the majority of curtain fabric is not pre-shrunk, retailers will rarely bring the risk of shrinkage to their customer's attention. It then falls to the dry cleaner to advise their customers of this potential risk to avoid a disappointed customer and a possible expensive claim.

Recovery of shrinkage

The most straightforward method is to use a Sandersshade, or the American equivalent machine (from Curtain Drape in America who are still manufacturing basically the same equipment) curtain finisher which will gently stretch the curtain back to its original size.

Most dry cleaners will not find it cost effective or have space to have their own curtain finisher in which case it is possible to restore the length by steaming and pulling gently over a steam press, but with wide curtains this could result in uneven hems.

Another alternative would be to hang the curtains, place weights on the hem or feed a copper pipe through the hem, then steam with a hose from a steam generator. The curtains may need to hang for a while to regain their length.

SUN DAMAGE (photo degeneration)

Sunlight has a well-known bleaching effect on fabrics, in the past cotton and linen sheets were soaked in milk and left out in fields to bleach in the sunlight after being woven.

The bleaching effect of the sun degenerates cellulose and protein at a molecular level so it is very effective damaging both cotton, linen and silk.

The areas to look out for are on the linings and the edges of the curtain, a curtain hanging on a South facing window will be affected more than the others so every curtain will need to be checked not just one.

If there is fading or colour change then there is damage, test the area by placing the fabric between the finger and thumb of both hands, and very gently pull away. If the fibres separate quite easily then they will be damaged by the mechanical action of the cleaning machine.

Please Note—This months Amber Alert is also dedicated to this subject giving advice to the customer.