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NF93-132 Hiring a Professional House Cleaner

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Niemeyer, Shirley and Prochaska-Cue, Kathleen, "NF93-132 Hiring a Professional House Cleaner" (1993).
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Hiring a Professional House Cleaner*

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*This publication was adapted in part from Oregon State University, "Checklist for Hiring a Professional Home Cleaning (8/88), and written by Mary Ann Sward. Readers: Cecelia Schweers, Carolyn Straub, Ruth Piva, Monica Braun, Myrna DuBois, Sharon Skipton, Nancy Schmerdtmann, Extension Home Economists; Ann Ziebarth, Extension Specialist, Housing; Don Deal, Department of Insurance; Richard Boucher, Attorney at Law; Sandra Hammer, cleaning business representative.

How do I find a cleaner to meet my needs? Can I get help with just a few tasks that are put off regularly? Do I need professional help on a regular basis? These and other questions are often asked when individuals or families consider alternatives to cleaning the home themselves.

This fact sheet will help you determine what kind of help is needed and how to select a professional if you decide you want one.

Why Hire a Professional?

- Free your time for activities which are more important to you.
- Do tasks you can't keep up with, or do safely.
- Reduce your contact with cleaning chemicals.
- Reduce stress, or conflict about getting cleaning done.

Before you interview cleaning service providers, make a list of regular cleaning tasks and how frequently these are done and prioritize which tasks you would most like to have someone else do for you.

- As you prioritize, consider:
- What tasks do you avoid because you dislike them?
- What tasks are physically difficult for you?
- What tasks require equipment or supplies that you don't have or prefer not to work with?
- What tasks do you prefer to do yourself?
- What items or areas are of special importance — for example, valuables or antiques that must be

cleaned with special procedures?

Other things to consider:

- List irregular and/or seasonal cleaning tasks and prioritize as you did the first list.
- Decide whether you want help with regular or seasonal tasks or both.
- List the common materials in your home, and the type of tools and cleaners that are suited to use on those materials. Locate use and care booklets for specific items requiring special care such as marble, porcelain, fiberglass, anti-stain carpets, etc.
- Decide how much you want to spend. Do you want to pay a set fee or pay on an hourly basis? Are you willing to spend enough money to have someone else do the task for you?
- Decide whether or not you want to be home when the cleaning is being done.

In determining whether you want to be at a home:

- Do you wish to leave a key in a pre-arranged location?
- Do you want to provide them with their own key?
- Will you need to move or pen your pet(s)?
- Will you be able to keep children out of their way?
- If you are home, will you feel guilty or uncomfortable, even if you are paying someone else to do the work for you?
- Understand the three general types of cleaning professionals: contracted cleaning service, contracted individuals, or employees. Consult with a legal expert about contracts for service and employees — especially regarding withholding for Social Security taxes and workmen's compensation, bonding and liability. Whatever type of cleaning professional you select, if the service or person is an "independent contractor," the agreement should specify that they are not entitled to reimbursement for expenses, and that they are required to make adequate provision in filings for social security and other taxes, procure liability and worker's compensation insurance, etc.
- Do you have liability insurance? Does it cover service persons in case of injury due to your negligence. Check with your insurance carrier to confirm and record the information.

Standard Setting and Evaluation

You will be more satisfied with cleaning services provided by an individual or firm with standards similar to your own. An important part of selecting cleaning services is communicating your standards to the cleaner(s) and coming to an agreement about how standards will be met.

- Return to the two lists (regular cleaning tasks and irregular or seasonal cleaning tasks) and write down, in your own words, how you would like to have the task done.
- Be specific. What types of cleaning products do you expect to be used? Describe the result of cleaning — shiny, free of dust, deposits and soil removed, etc.
- Are your standards realistic? Is there any real need for the floors to be disinfected? Do you expect a higher standard from the providers than you would expect from yourself? Why?
- Are you open to compromise on some of the standards? Which ones?
- If the job can be done in another way and achieve the same end, are you willing to go with the professional's judgment on the best way to do the job?

Cleaning Products

There are three alternatives related to cleaning equipment and supplies:

- You provide cleaning products and equipment.
- The professional provides products and equipment.
- Some combination of the above.

Some professionals will only work with their own equipment and supplies. There are advantages to you when the professional provides cleaning materials and equipment:

- Your budget for the professional includes the equipment and supplies.
- You do not have so many potentially toxic substances to store in your home. This may be an important consideration in households with small children.
- You may not need to replace your cleaning equipment, like vacuum cleaners, as frequently.
- Professional cleaners may have access to materials and equipment not readily available to you.
- Professional cleaners are usually more knowledgeable using their own products or chemicals on a regular basis.

There are advantages when you provide the materials and equipment:

- You have greater control over the methods and materials used in cleaning.
- You can determine whether you use a separate cleaning product for each task or one or two basic products.
- You will have a complete set of supplies on hand for "touch ups" needed between professional cleanings.

Selecting Individuals or Services to Interview

Whether hiring individuals or cleaning services, consider:

- Personal compatibility
- Similar standards
- Who takes care of providing employees with training
- Bonding for liability
- Provision of a written list of services and price structure.
- Who takes care of social security withholdings, workmen's compensation and similar requirements
- How staff turnover or illnesses are handled

Interviewing and Selecting a Professional

Conduct your interviews with prospective professionals in an organized and professional manner.

Schedule the interviews in advance, and at your home. Be sure that they understand that you are also interviewing other professionals.

Ask the same questions in each interview:

- Review your two lists of cleaning tasks and your priorities. Ask if they can do the tasks you would like to have done.
- Have clear explanations of your standards for each task, preferably written on paper with a copy

for the professional.

- Be prepared with potential cleaning dates and budget limits.
- Ask about bonding, liability, and payroll withholding for Social Security taxes and workmen's compensation. Ask about contracted and common law employees. Discuss with the individual professional how withholding will be handled. Check with Internal Revenue Service (toll free 1-800-424-1040) to find out your responsibilities as an employer. It might be prudent to obtain the name of the person's insurance carrier to verify the existence of insurance, liability limits for personal injury and property damage, and whether the insurance extends coverage to activities in your home. Record the information obtained, date, and name of the person called.
- Discuss how you will handle keys or letting them into your home. Duplication and return of keys should be discussed.
- Discuss how change in cleaning dates due to holidays or special events are handled. Can cleaning dates be changed occasionally — if so how?
- Ask for references.
- Determine what types of training and experience the professional has had.
- Determine how knowledgeable the professional is regarding: selection of appropriate chemicals — acids, alkalis, abrasives, absorptives, solvents, disinfectants, etc. for the material and the soil; selection of appropriate tools and techniques for the materials. Does the professional understand the basis of cleaning products, safe use, and which types of cleaners to use on various materials, such as use of non-abrasives on delicate or easily scratched surfaces.
- Determine what happens in the event your property is damaged through misuse or carelessness. Ask them for a copy of the claim form from their insurance carrier and clarify what type of information will be needed in the event of damage.
- After interviewing, hire your best choice. Then establish a written list of tasks to be done each time. Specify how each task is done and types of cleaning products and tools to be used and how complaints will be handled. Both parties will need to sign this before the first work is done. Also sign a written agreement on payment procedures and clarify in writing how either party can remove themselves from the agreements listed above.

Before the Cleaner Arrives — Getting Yourself Organized

Most cleaning persons or services do not sort junk, put away clothes and clean off counters. In order to maximize the effectiveness of your hired cleaner(s), you should prepare for their arrival. The arrival of the professional should be a relief to you, not another stress. You should be realistic about this stress, there is no need to clean before the cleaner arrives. The professional can concentrate on their tasks if you can find time to do the following:

- Pick up and sort clutter.
- Dump the trash (if not included in the service).
- Put soiled clothes, towels, or others in the laundry room. Store clean clothing.
- Dump and refill the litter box if you have a cat

Arrange to have the cleaner come on a good day of the week for you. If your household tends to get things picked up on Sunday evenings, then if the cleaner could come early in the week you would not have extra preparation to do. Or if you prefer to have the house cleaned for weekend guests, plan the cleaning for the end of the week.

Evaluation of Your Professional

After you have had a professional working for you for a few months, review this NebFact to be sure that

your needs are still being met. Evaluate the situation at least twice a year, more often if your family circumstances change. Examples of changes that might affect your relationship with your professional cleaner include:

- Addition of or reduction of number of people in the household
- Changes in your income level
- New pets
- Major home remodeling

Training

To assist in answers to questions about cleaning products and procedures, the following publications available at your local Cooperative Extension Office may be of help:

Home Furnishings:

EC 2057, *Carpet Care and Cleaning*

RP 272, *Family Keepsakes*

EC 419, *Home Furnishings Care - Cleaning and Stain Removal*

RP 294, *Upholstered Furniture Care - Cleaning and Stain Removal*

EC 422, *Household Cleaning and Laundry Products: Which One for the Job?*

NebFacts:

NF93-135, *Care and Display of Glass*

NF93-136, *Chemical Spots, Stains and Discoloration of Textile Home Furnishings*

NF93-138, *Preservation of Paper Items*

NF93-139, *Preservation of Metal Items*

Fact Sheet 22, *Caring for Wood Furniture: The Basics*

File NF132 under HOME MANAGEMENT
A-1, Housekeeping Methods and Work Simplification
Issued June 1993

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Elbert C. Dickey, Director of Cooperative Extension, University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

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