

Consumer Information Guide:

Choosing the Right Carpet Cleaning Company for You

I know that choosing a carpet cleaning company isn't an easy thing to do. You may have been putting off getting your carpets professionally cleaned for that reason.

What makes choosing a company so difficult? Well, for one thing, there's the matter of trust. It's not as easy as just picking a name out of the phone book when it comes to letting a stranger into your home. You want to be sure you choose a reputable company with a history of professionalism and service to its clients. There's also the chance that you may have seen or heard about some of the less than ethical tactics practiced by unscrupulous cleaners such as offering a too-good-to-be-true low price only to pressure the consumer with offensive sales tactics once they've gained entrance to your home. And what about the quality of the work itself? You want to be sure you're getting a competent, highly trained professional and not some unqualified, under trained, part-time technician who, chances are, can cause more harm than good attempting to clean your carpet.

So what can you do to be sure you're getting the best value for your money when it comes to carpet cleaning? Start by reading this Consumer Information Guide. It was written with you, the carpet cleaning customer, in mind. It provides answers to the most frequently asked questions consumers have along with explaining the options available to consumers today when it comes to carpet cleaning. After reading this information you'll know what questions to ask a prospective cleaner and be better prepared to make an informed, intelligent decision.

This Information Guide covers a number of common road blocks that can frustrate you the consumer. It contains information about:

- **6 Misconceptions and Myths** about carpet cleaning
- How to avoid the 2 most common **Carpet Cleaning Rip-offs**
- **4 Mistakes to Avoid** when choosing a carpet cleaning company
- **9 Questions to Ask** before you hire a carpet cleaner
- **2 Printout Forms** to help you choose your next service provider

Of course, even this guide may not cover all of your questions. If that's the case and you have any questions regarding specific areas of concern such as pet odor, upholstery cleaning, spot and stain removal or anything else, don't hesitate to give me a call at 303-898-9925. You can also visit our website (www.myliteguarantee.com) for more information regarding these and other topics. While you're there you can subscribe to our blog, it's a great collection of tips and techniques for keeping your healthy home environment.

Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Guide. We hope it helps you become more comfortable with choosing the right carpet cleaning company for your needs.

Sincerely,

Jeff McLaughlin

Misconceptions and Myths about carpet cleaning and carpet cleaning services

As the number of Carpet Cleaning Service providers has expanded, it seems that the number of misconceptions and outright myths about carpet cleaning services has expanded too. There are probably a number of these that you have heard before, and maybe a few that you thought were true! The goal of this section is not to make you feel silly for thinking this way, but help you understand the reasons why these are misconceptions and myths so you can avoid the frustration that these beliefs can lead to.

1) You Shouldn't Clean Your Carpets too Often

Wrong. I'm not saying you should have your carpets cleaned every month, but carpet cleaning on a regular basis will serve to make your carpeting last longer and your home to be healthier. Why?

- **Dirt and grime are destructive to carpets.** They are abrasive, and every time you walk on your carpet you grind this "sandpaper dirt" into your carpet's fibers. This grinding causes carpeting to wear out much faster than it should. Regular maintenance like vacuuming helps, but vacuuming alone isn't enough to pull the dirt and other pollutants out of your carpet.
- **There is also your family's health to consider when deciding how often to have your carpets cleaned.** Your carpet is really just a very big filter for all the dust, dirt, allergens, bacteria and grime that find their way into your home. Like any filter, your carpet functions best when it is clean. When a carpet is clean, it traps these unwanted guests in its fibers. As time goes by, those fibers become full and are no longer very effective at trapping those unseen nasties. This is, I believe, the most compelling reason to schedule regular, effective deep cleaning of carpets.
- **If you or someone you love suffers from allergies, asthma or other breathing problems, one of the first things you should do is to have your carpets professionally cleaned.** A dirty, overloaded carpet (or filter) can be a problem source of irritants for allergy and asthma sufferers. A professionally cleaned and maintained carpet (or filter) can be an effective tool in the battle against these irritants and allergens.

Naturally the next question is how often should I get my carpets cleaned? This depends of the use of the carpet, type of carpet, animals on the carpet and the outdoor environment surrounding your home. Asking a qualified and reliable professional is the best way to determine your homes unique needs. Usually the recommended time frame will be between every 6-18 months.



2) I Can Do Just as Good of a Job with a Do-it-Yourself Rental Machine

There are 3 issues that come up with do-it-yourself machines that separate it from professional equipment.

- **Equipment:** The problem with the machines that you can rent, or buy at the local supermarket or hardware store is that they don't get the water hot enough to truly get your carpet deeply cleaned, and they don't have the suction power to fully remove the dirt and grime from your carpet. A typical do-it-yourself machine costs roughly \$300. A quality professional portable machine costs around \$4,000, and most cleaners typically spend nearly \$18,000 for a professional truck mount unit. Which of these systems do you think does a better job? If all of them worked the same do you think professional cleaners would spend the money for a truck mount when a \$300 machine would do the same job?
- **Quality of cleaners:** The quality of the cleaners that come with a do-it-yourself machine is another issue. These over the counter cleaners are designed as universal products that anyone can use and will not damage their carpet. Your local carpet cleaning professional has access to much more effective cleaners that are not sold to the public. These cleaners are supplied to qualified professionals because when used correctly they do a far better job of cleaning than any over the counter cleaner, but if used incorrectly they can damage your carpet.
- **Time:** The question to ask yourself is "How much is my time worth?" Do you really want to try and save a few dollars by going out renting equipment, learning how to use it, doing the actual work, then cleaning up and taking the equipment back? Is it really worth it?



3) All Carpet Cleaning Methods are the Same

While the equipment varies there are essentially two methods that are employed to clean residential carpet, low moisture and extraction.

- **Low Moisture** is a cleaning system that applies either an absorbent powder to the carpet, or spraying a cleaning compound onto the carpet. Then the carpet is scrubbed with usually a rotary bonnet machine. The machine uses cotton pads to absorb dirt and contaminants and must be changed frequently. This method tends to leave quite a lot of dirt and other pollutants

behind because your carpet is not rinsed in any way. It would be a lot like washing your dishes with a dry chemical powder and then “rinsing” them by vacuuming them.

These cleaning systems clean only the top of the carpet fibers, leaving dirt and contaminants in the lower portions of your carpet. They also leave the sandpaper like materials in your carpet that cut and wear on your carpet causing premature wear and replacement. Last the types of machines that most of these systems use scrub your carpet employ a rotary head that will void your carpets warranty. For these reasons Low Moisture cleaning systems are NOT recommended for residential carpet cleaning.

- **Hot Water Extraction** is the industry term for steam cleaning. Simply put this method applies a hot cleaning solution on your carpet at high pressure. The combination of heat, cleaner and pressure frees dirt and contaminants from your carpet fibers and suspends them in water. This is paired with a very strong vacuum that removes the water and the contaminants suspended in it from your home.

The advantage of hot water extraction is a complete removal of dirt, contaminants, and pollutants from all areas of your carpet. The strong vacuum removes the solid particles that cause wear and damage to your carpet, and it doesn't void your manufactures warranty. The world's largest manufacturer of carpeting, Shaw Industries, recommends the hot water extraction method as the preferred method of carpet cleaning. Actually Shaw Industries' residential carpet warranties are voided if any system other than hot water extraction is used.

4) If They Have the Right Equipment, My Carpets Will Be Properly Cleaned

If you are reading this Information Guide then you probably have Googled carpet cleaners in your area. If not give it a try because odds are on the front page of almost every website you will see a picture of their truck mount extractor and a bunch of facts about it. This trend seems to be what keeps this misconception in circulation. But just having the right equipment doesn't mean they know how to use it properly.

Think of a mechanic's tool set. Just because you neighbor has a set is he qualified to diagnose and repair your car? Probably not, instead you take your car to an ASE Certified mechanic because even if he has the same tool set as your neighbor he has the training and experience to get the job done right. So don't be fooled by pictures of equipment and statistics about it, instead look for certification. Certifications tell you that they know how to properly use their equipment, getting you the best job possible. We will touch more on certifications later in the Information Guide in the **Mistakes to Avoid** section. For now here are the most common carpet cleaning certification institutions; (Carpet and Rug Institute) CRI, WoolSafe Certification, or the largest and most recognized institute (Institute of Inspection Cleaning & Restoration Certification) the IICRC.



5) All of the Carpet Cleaning Companies in my area are Basically the Same, So I Should Just Go with the Lowest Price

This just isn't true. Too-good-to-be-true low prices are often the doorway to a bad experience when it comes to carpet cleaning. Besides being a tactic employed by less than ethical, bait and switch companies, low prices are often the sign of under trained technicians and companies using outdated methods and/or equipment.

- **The truth of the matter is this: despite what you may have seen in the Yellow Pages or the coupon mailers, no one can do a good job, much less make a living, cleaning your carpets for a low price.** What many people who have since become loyal customers of mine have found out is that this low price is often just a way to get in your home. Once these companies have gained entrance to your home, you may find that the price they advertised isn't for a complete and thorough cleaning or, that worse yet, they begin pressuring you into spending more money for extra services that you really don't want.
- **Experience:** Another downside to low prices is that the cleaner may not really know what he is doing and/or using outdated equipment and methods of cleaning. Sometimes it is the sign of someone new to the business, who may or may not have the knowledge needed to provide you with first quality cleaning and service. Low prices are often used by inexperienced cleaners as a way to get their foot in your door.

6) Any Carpet Cleaner and Especially an Honest One Should be able to Give Me an Over the Phone Estimate

Sadly believing this misconception will actually eliminate quality companies from your list as you are making phone calls. This is because every home is unique. Even if you live in an apartment complex or a subdivision that only has a few floor models. There are difference in carpet construction, type and color. However the biggest differences are the traffic levels, wear and depending on the last time it was cleaned how soiled the carpet is.

Instead of doing a generic over the phone "ballpark" estimate, a quality company will always wish to do an onsite carpet evaluation. We always send a manager to come and inspect the carpet. Our manager looks for things like the type of fiber the carpet is made out of, furniture that has to be moved, level of wear and soiling in the carpet, and quality of the instillation. By looking at all of these aspects we can provide an exact written quote of the cost of the work you would like done. It also allows us to make recommendations for the best way to get the results you are looking for, without being told you need a more expensive service after work has already begun. As you can imagine this means that no two quotes are exactly alike.



How to Avoid the 2 Most Common Carpet Cleaning Rip-offs

Would you like to know the number one reason that we have heard from our new customers of why it has been so long since they last cleaned their carpet? It's not because they were busy and forgot, or because money was too tight. The most common reason our new customers have waited for sometimes years to clean their carpet is because they had such a bad experience with their last cleaner. Usually they were a victim of bad cleaning or an outright rip-off. While there are a number of reputable companies in any area, there are also a number of unethical companies. Here are a few warning signs to watch out for.

1) Bait and Switch

While the tactic of bait and switch has been around for many years, the great recession seems to have made them bolder and more plentiful. This is because they thrive when people are simply doing price shopping. Here is how a bait and switch works

- A very low price to get themselves in your door. This price advertising will usually be some kind of package deal, so many rooms for so much, or whole house for a certain price. The point of this advertising is to have you schedule an appointment and get a technician and equipment in your home.
- The technician will then do a walk through, at the end he will tell you that what you need, or what you want is not covered by the coupon. Some common tactics are you need to pay for soap because that was not included, you need extra spotting treatments that are not covered, or you do not live in the area that the coupon was valid for.
- Then after figuring out the adjusted cost your bill is double or more of what the coupon was.
- Another tactic is to begin cleaning without talking about the price and then asking if you would like them to do something. They usually phrase it in a way that makes you think it is being thrown in for free, but actually they are adding to your bill. Then you get an unwelcome surprise when your final bill is handed to you.



The best way to avoid bait and switch is to shop by Value not Price. Instead of making the first question you ask a carpet cleaning company a price question, find out what is involved in their cleaning process. Learn what steps and procedures are included and considered standard. Most reputable companies will have 2 or 3 packages listing the steps for each package. So you know any advertisement that doesn't include basic necessary steps for proper carpet cleaning; like pre-spray, spotting and a final rinse in the extraction water are, in our opinion, bait and switch.

Always get a written quote before you allow any work to begin in your home. The estimate should have a written description of all the areas to be cleaned, all of the steps being used on your carpet, and a final price. Remember an estimate is by definition a close to amount, a quote is exactly what it will cost to do the work that you would like done.

If the coupon or deal sounds too good to be true, it is. Don't reward the bait and switch company with your business. As mentioned before no company can do a good job or survive cleaning carpets for a low price. Don't be fooled by the advertising and if a company tries any of these tricks that we mentioned here politely tell them to leave and schedule a quality company to come to your home. Some companies like ours even offer same day service so you will not waste a day off, and get the quality care that your home deserves.

2) False Carpet Protector

We are definitely **not** saying you should skip having a protector applied to your carpet. A protector, like Scotchgard, is a key component to keeping your carpets looking great and lasting for years of use. Your carpets manufacturer applies a treatment of it as the final step of the manufacturing process, and recommends a reapplication with every professional cleaning. While a number of companies manufacture carpet protector, we only use and recommend Scotchgard by 3M.

Yet this can easily be turned into a rip-off by unethical cleaners. While they are charging you to apply Scotchgard, they apply what we like to call Aquagard. They will water down their product to make it go further, not apply as directed or just use straight water. How can you avoid paying for improper application and water?

- **Ask the technicians to prepare the protector mixture in your house.** This will give you a chance to see the product bottle and how they mix it. If you see a bottle that is unfamiliar ask them what it is and to see it. This will allow you identify if it is really a protector or something else, every bottle will have dilution instruction on it that you can check to make sure the mixture is correct, and you will see how many square feet each gallon of protector can cover.
- **Look at the sprayer that they are going to use to apply the protector.** The recommended tool to apply protector is either; 1) an inline sprayer that uses water from an extractor and mixes it with undiluted product from a solution tank at the sprayer 2) a battery powered or plug in sprayer usually that applies a premixed solution.

There are 2 reasons why this is the only correct way to apply carpet protector

- 1) **Even application;** pump up sprayers will vary in how much product they apply depending on the pressure in the sprayer. A mechanical sprayer produces consistent pressure that assures an even application of Scotchgard on your carpets.
- 2) **Proper quantity;** pump up sprayers do not have the necessary flow or tank capacity to properly apply protector. For example Scotchgard's application rate is 1 gallon for every 200 square feet. That would require a pump up sprayer to spray the same area of carpet for 5-10 seconds. We have also seen some companies that apply protector with a 2 quart pump up hand sprayer, do you think a technician

with a 2 quart sprayer will refill his sprayer every 100 square feet for proper application?

- 3) **Guarantee Certification:** Here is another reason that we only use and recommend Scotchgard. Scotchgard provides a certificate to carpet cleaning companies that buy Scotchgard. After applying it to a carpet, the company is supposed to give the certificate you the home owner. Its proof that you have genuine Scotchgard, and gives you a 1 year spot and spill warranty. If a company asks you to purchase Scotchgard ask them if they have their certificates.



A quick note; as mentioned a number of manufactures make carpet protectors. We prefer to use Scotchgard because of the quality, the paperwork that proves to you that it was applied and because it is environmentally friendly. It doesn't use prefluorocatanyl chemicals (PFOS) which provides enhanced environmental, health, and safety benefits.

4 Mistakes to Avoid When Choosing Your Carpet Cleaner

When choosing your next carpet cleaner, be sure to avoid these 4 common mistakes. Paying attention to these areas will help you avoid inadequate and unscrupulous services, as well as insuring that highly trained and knowledgeable professionals are working in your home.



1) Choosing a Company That Doesn't Have a 100% Money Back Guarantee

Although it seems like a no brainer, not all companies guarantee their work. If a company is not willing to stand behind their work, do they really belong in your home? Before you hire a company to come into your home find out if they have a guarantee, and where you can see it in writing.

We provide every one of our customers with a written signed and dated guarantee certificate. If you are unhappy with a cleaning we will re-clean the area for free, and if you still are not satisfied you don't pay for the cleaning.

2) Choosing a Company that is Not IICRC Certified

The IICRC (Institute of Inspection Cleaning & Restoration Certification) provides certification for companies that do cleaning and restoration work. Not every company can be IICRC certified. It can

only be earned by study, experience and passing written exams. It is in a sense a degree in carpet cleaning. Another aspect of qualifying as an IICRC certified company is to always carry business insurance a pledge to uphold ethical business practices and service.

When you choose an IICRC business you are choosing a professional, reliable, experienced and educated business. The IICRC provided written certification to its members; you can also check and see which companies are certified at their website www.iicrc.org.

3) Allowing Uncertified Technicians to Work in Your Home

While this may seem redundant from the last point, many people don't realize that the IICRC certified companies and people separately. This individual certification is provided to insure that each technician knows how to handle various aspects of cleaning and restoration.

Each individual who is IICRC certified receives a card with their ID number, the expiration date of their certification and a list of what they are certified in. Ask to see the IICRC cards of the technicians working in your home and make sure they are properly trained to perform your scheduled work.

4) Not Having a Written Quote in Hand Before Any Work is Started

As we mentioned earlier having a written quote before the work begins will prevent you from falling victim to the bait and switch predatory carpet cleaners. It will also prevent you from getting an unpleasant surprise when you are handed your final bill.

By always insisting on a written quote, not an estimate, you are always informed of exactly what you are buying. We like to think of a written quote as a good form of communication between us and our clients.

- It allows you to know what we are doing and makes sure that all of your areas of concern are being addressed.
- It protects you from answering what seems like a casual question that actually is adding money to your bill.
- It provides both sides with a written contract that protects everyone.

By just avoiding these 4 common mistakes you will make sure that your next carpet cleaning is headache free, and provides the quality and service that you want.

9 Questions to ask your Carpet Cleaner on the Phone

Have you ever called a new carpet cleaning company to get some information, and when the phone was answered the only thing that came to your mind was to ask, "How much do you charge?" Why is that the first and sometimes the only question that comes to mind? The answer may surprise you. Carpet cleaners spend millions of dollars each year advertising on price alone, but don't do anything to



educate consumers on how to select the best quality and value. That is why we compiled this list of 9 questions to ask your next carpet cleaner. We have also provided a printable phone question form you can print out and take notes on the help you select your next cleaner. We recommend first learning about their company and then their cleaning methods.

1) Are you an IICRC Certified Company?

Ask for their entity number and to see a copy of their certificate when they come to give you a quote. If they are not a certified entity, then its best to look for another cleaner.

2) Will you send IICRC Certified technicians to my house with their IICRC Cards?

This will make sure all the workers in your house are educated professionals. If a company cannot send you a crew with every member certified, or a crew where everyone “forgot” their card then choose a different company.

3) Are you Insured and Bonded?

This will protect everyone if something goes wrong. Ask them to show you a proof of valid insurance along with their companies IICRC certification certificate when you get your quote.

4) Do you have endorsements or referrals from past customers, and where can I see them?

Most companies have reviews and testimonials on their website. Find out if they have any online reviews at places like Angies List or Google, or get phone numbers of past customers you can call.

5) What kind of Cleaning Process do you use?

The best cleaning that is possible is a dual system cleaning. A dual system uses special machine to agitate, or scrub the cleaners into the carpet. This provides the deepest clean and cleans all the surfaces of the carpet fibers. The agitation also loosens more soil and contaminants. The scrubbing machine is followed by a thorough hot water extraction.

The best dual process machines scrub with a brush like that on a vacuum beater bar. These machines are gentle on the carpet while being tough on dirt. Remember, rotary scrubbing machines, those that work like floor buffers, are harder on your carpet and will void the manufacturer’s warranty.

6) What kind of equipment do you use?

Make sure your cleaner is using hot water extraction. Be wary of any cleaner that has “the only system like this in town” or “brand new” technology or process. These are usually some kind of twist on a low moisture cleaning system. Ask if they use any type of rotary scrub on your carpet because this will void your manufactures warranty.

Find out if they use a truck mount extractor or a portable extractor. Both can and will do an excellent job of cleaning your carpet when being used by a skilled professional. While a truck mount

extractor is preferred, a properly rated portable will do just as good of a job. The Carpet and Rug Institute rates portable extractors. Make sure it is a Gold Rated portable.

7) What Services are Considered Standard, and are Included in your Regular Square Foot Price?

This is the best way to judge the value of the service offered. The proper method of carpet cleaning will include: pre vacuuming, pre-spray, agitation of the cleaner either by hand brush or a machine, rinsing with an extractor, spot treatments, setting the carpet pile, and placing an air mover to help dry the carpet.

8) What are your Guarantees, and where can I see them in Writing?

This lets you know upfront what to expect. Also being able to see them in writing somewhere makes sure the Guarantee is valid, not just a empty promise.

9) When will I know the full cost of your service? /or Can you come and give me a Free No Obligation quote for my house?

This makes sure that you will not be the victim of a bait and switch. If you are really happy with the answers that have been provided so far ask for an in home quote for having your carpets cleaned.



We want to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time and reading our Consumer Information Guide. We hope the information has been helpful and educational. If you have any questions regarding this Guide, or additional questions about choosing a carpet cleaner please feel free to contact us. We will be happy to provide any help that we can. Also if you are interested in having us provide you with a Free No Obligation quote for services in your home you can contact us by phone 303-898-9925 or email elitecnr@gmail.com.

Thanks Again

Jeff McLaughlin
Elite Carpet Cleaning & Restoration
303-898-9925