

PTAC Cleaning, Energy Savings Made Easy with Help of Service Companies

10/17/2012 By Glenn Hasek



NATIONAL REPORT—Lodging owners are increasingly turning to service companies to handle the cleaning and maintenance of their packaged terminal air conditioners (PTACs). Benefits include increased air flow and energy efficiency, improved indoor air quality within the guestroom, elimination of unpleasant odors, fewer breakdowns, the extension of the life of the PTACs by as much as three to five years, cost savings, and peace of mind knowing that the job has indeed been done. A few of the companies that now offer cleaning and maintenance services throughout the United States include Cintas Corp., Dream Green Services, LLC, and Fibercare. These companies can also service other types of heating and cooling systems (VTACs, split-system units, etc.).

Representatives of the companies mentioned above agreed that many lodging owners fail to service their PTACs as often as required. Fred Wehby, senior director of Deep Clean Services at [Cintas](#), says PTAC maintenance was one of the investments that fell by the wayside during the recent recession. Cintas formally announced its air-conditioning (A/C) coil cleaning service called ChemTron Coil Cleaning by Cintas late last year.

“We are currently in 85 of the top 100 metropolitan areas,” Wehby says.

Susie Pfeiffer, co-owner and president of four-year-old [Dream Green Services](#), whose company also provides nationwide coverage, says PTACs should be thoroughly cleaned no less than once a year. Properties located along coast lines and in desert environments should be serviced twice each year. Location does impact the frequency at which PTACs should be cleaned—even at the very local level. Wehby says PTACs located especially on the first and second floor should be given more attention because of lawn mowing debris and dirt, leaves, and even small critters. Filters should be cleaned in all PTACs once a month.

Measurable Difference After Cleaning

The difference in PTAC performance after a cleaning is immediate and significant. Cintas studies have shown an up to 8.5 degree temperature improvement, up to 28 percent increase in airflow, and up to 17 percent energy savings. According to Dream Green Services, an annual PTAC cleaning can result in an associated electricity bill decrease of 6 percent per month.

While the goal of each service company is the same—the cleaning and servicing of the PTAC unit—each company has its own unique process. Dream Green Services, which also replaces and repairs PTACs, uses a steam cleaning method where pressured hot water is applied to the unit to remove dirt, grime and any mold that may have grown. To avoid corrosion and environmental damage, the company says it uses an eco-friendly soap to help lift dirt from the unit’s coils, fins and surface areas. The dirty water is vacuumed away after the washing. The process is performed in the hallway of the property in a self-contained box. Filters are also cleaned.

Using technicians certified to perform the service, Dream Green Services will also remove Freon from PTACs. It is put into a reclaiming machine so that the customer can use it again. Dream Green Services

will also take away old PTACs for recycling. The disassembling of a PTAC for its valuable metals is “totally worth the process,” Pfeiffer says.

Care Taken During Cleaning



Cintas technicians service PTACs within the guestroom itself. To prevent any backsplash, a tarp is placed on the floor and the bed is covered as well. The PTAC is placed on a tray on the tarp.

“We focus on cleaning the coils with a foaming product,” Wehby says. “It penetrates between the coils and fins. It helps push dirt toward the outside of the unit, making it easier to rinse with room temperature water. We clean the pan. You can get some mold growth there. We remove the sludge. We treat the drain lines, spray the entire system with a disinfectant, and insert a strip that has a disinfectant on it in the bottom of the pan. We also clean and sanitize the filters.”

Wehby says his company’s cleaning process is certified by the Green Clean Institute and is Energy Star certified.

[Fibercare](#), a 30-year-old company, cleans the PTAC within the guestroom. Ashton Grudnowski, president of Fibercare, says the farther PTACs are moved, the greater the risk of damage occurring. Fibercare uses a steam cleaning process along with a non-toxic, biodegradable product. In areas where the heater coil will be used, Grudnowski recommends paying special attention to its cleaning.

Very Reasonable Payback Time

The cost of service varies by company and by the level of cleaning and maintenance service provided. Grudnowski says her company performed a study to determine the payback time of a PTAC cleaning service. They found that within two to three months time, the energy savings alone paid for the service.

PTAC and other types of heating and cooling equipment cleaning and maintenance does take coordination between hotel management and the service company. A service company may not come out unless there are a minimum number of units to clean. In cases where a room is “occupied,” the hotel may need to provide an escort for the service technician.

Savings Add up Quickly When PTACs are Properly Maintained

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When chatting with someone for an article on PTAC (packaged terminal air conditioner) cleaning and maintenance this past week, I was a bit taken aback by a comment he made. “When staying in a hotel, stay above the third floor,” he said. Was he serious? What he meant is that the closer PTACs and other types of heating and cooling systems are to the ground, the dirtier they will get—from lawn mowing, wind-blown debris, and even small critters looking for a home. If those PTACs are not cleaned as often as recommended, your guests on the lower floors are more likely to be exposed to a guestroom with mold and indoor air quality problems, in addition to a PTAC that is less efficient and more likely to fail.

Should travelers have to worry about the quality of the air coming out of a PTAC? Certainly not. As someone else told me this past week when chatting about proper PTAC cleaning and maintenance, when it comes to PTAC cleaning, there should be an industry standard that every lodging establishment should follow.

For my article on PTAC cleaning services, I spoke with representatives of three companies: Cintas, Dream Green Services, and Fibercare. Each company has its own unique approach to PTAC cleaning and maintenance. What they all share is a desire to get PTACs and other types of heating and cooling systems not only clean but also operating in an as close to brand new condition as possible. Be sure to read [my article](#).

Fast Payback on Investment

If you are not having your PTACs thoroughly cleaned at least once a year (twice a year in coastal and desert environments) and your PTAC filters cleaned once a month, you are literally throwing money out the window. One vendor told me the cost of having a service company come out to clean and maintain your PTACs can be recovered in just two to three months in energy savings alone.

PTACs that are cleaned properly are more energy efficient, pass air through more freely, and have fewer breakdowns (a guest satisfaction and labor concern and cost). Cintas studies have shown an up to 8.5 degree temperature improvement, up to 28 percent increase in airflow, and up to 17 percent energy savings. According to Dream Green Services, an annual PTAC cleaning can result in an associated electricity bill decrease of 6 percent per month.

Two vendor representatives told me that PTAC cleaning often fell by the wayside during the recession. Did you let that happen at your property or properties? Now that our industry is bouncing back, it is time to re-energize your PTAC preventive maintenance program. You will be glad you did. You owe it to yourself, your investors and, most importantly, your guests.

Paired with an effective guestroom energy management system, regular PTAC cleaning and maintenance can extend the life of your PTAC assets for at least three to five years. How can you say no to that?