

Establishing Effective Tent Washing & Drying Processes



Overview

Whether your operation hand washes or machine washes tent material, a major element when working towards improving the operating efficiency of tent rental operation is to focus on the tent washing and drying process. Within any tent rental business, the process of washing and drying of tents can represent considerable labor hours every year and when looking to improve operating efficiencies, the tent washing and drying process is often a good place to start.

This whitepaper is designed to help tent rental owners and operators identify steps in the process, labor and equipment requirements, and opportunities to improve the tent washing and drying processes once the steps of the process have been properly defined.

Making the Choice of Manual Tent Washing

Once a tent rental operator decides to go down the path of manually washing tents, there are a number of factors to consider beyond the number of workers that will be required to complete the washing and drying process. The following are some key considerations.

- **Washing Location:** In most operations, floor space is at a premium, so when assessing the best possible location in the warehouse for tent washing, make sure that the space is clean and free of contaminants. Tents washed on contaminated surfaces can easily come out of the washing process looking worse than when it started.
- **Floor Surface:** The concrete floor should have a “no brush” surface – brushed surface concrete is highly abrasive and may quickly damage vinyl tent material. Additionally, the brushed surface creates a situation where dirt that is trapped in the miniscule crevices of the tent material that is being washed on top of this rough surface making it that much more difficult to clean. When working on a smooth concrete surface, it is much easier with the use of terry cloth material and soft bristle brushes to remove grime. One should avoid the use of soft, smooth cotton rags as this material does not have the ability to easily clean the surface of the tent top.
- **Drainage:** The floor should have a slope to allow for proper water run off. A floor drain should be within close proximity to allow for ridding the floor of the excess water. Assuming that the tents are dried in the same space as they are washed, getting rid of excess water will aid tremendously in the tent drying process.
- **Mops and Brushes:** Having an inventory of traditional heavy large capacity floor mops much like the type used by the roofing industry along with a 4” soft bristle brush with soft ends to the bristles will be necessary to rid the tent top of embedded dirt.

Establishing Effective Tent Washing & Drying Processes



- **Squeegee Machine:** Much like the Zamboni machine used on ice rinks, smaller scale squeegee machines are available for removing much of the excess water that will collect on the surface of the floor. Keeping the floor free of standing water will help greatly in the tent drying process, again assuming that the tent is dried in the same space as it is being washed.
- **No Water Method:** A number of tent rental operators have found the “no water” method for tent cleaning to be quite effective when facing space, water drainage and drying space limitations within their operations. With this method, the operator sets up a row of folding tables end-to-end to accommodate the width of a tent panel (e.g. 10’ wide panel would likely require two tables end-to-end). The operator then places a section of tent material on the table and apply tent cleaning solvent such as Teeco’s Pure Clean or Teeco’s Tent Stain Eliminator and with terry cloth material wipes the tent clean without soap, water or rinsing. When the section is clean and dried the operator simply slides the section of tent forward and moves on to the next section. This approach to tent cleaning delivers a clean tent and saves time in that no drying of the tent material is required and tent webbing also remains dry in the process.

An alternative to the manual washing of tents is to own or lease a large capacity tent washer machine designed specifically to wash large panels of tent material for your own operations. Additionally, some companies that have purchased commercial tent washers have also found new revenue line-of-business opportunity by offering outsource services for tent washing. The following provides some key considerations when deciding to “mechanize the manual” and automate the tent washing process.

Deciding to Automate the Washing Process

Many tent rental operators today have found significant value in automating the tent washing process by purchasing or leasing a commercial tent washer designed specifically to wash large volumes of tent material. In order for a business to cost justify the capital expenditure, it is prudent to take a hard look at the number of workers dedicated to the manual washing of tents. With a washing machine, the number of workers required to wash tents can easily be cut in half allowing management to either reallocate the workers’ time to other jobs in the operation or trim staff accordingly. Additional value of the use of a tent washer is the fact that tent inventory is quickly turned around and ready to go out for the next job. What’s more, given the deeper cleaning that occurs with the use of a tent washer, operators find that they are able to migrate a portion of their dingy grade “B” tents to a grade “A” tent thereby realizing an incremental lift in revenue. And finally, Teeco Solutions frequently receives reports from customers indicting that in the first year of using a tent washer that they find that it is not necessary to replace as many tops because the tops are so effectively cleaned that existing inventory lasts longer thus making more “A” grade tents available for rental.

Establishing Effective Tent Washing & Drying Processes



Before beginning the process of washing tents in a machine, the following are some key considerations to ensure that the quality and integrity of the tent is maintained.

- **Preparation:** In preparation of the tent material to be washed it is best to consult with the manufacturer of the tent washer. The operator should consider such factors as water temperature, water volume, top preparation and type of detergent to name but a few. Again, consult the manufacturer to ensure that all necessary steps are taken to properly prepare the tent material for mechanized washing.
- **Repairs:** Once the top is clean, it will be readily apparent as to where repairs are needed, thus extending the life of the top.
- **Frequency:** One of the key advantages of mechanizing the tent washing process is the fact that experience has shown that tents washed by machine frequently will go 3 or 4 rentals before requiring a washing. However, for some operators, because the labor requirements are so low, tents are washed after every use. Additionally, we know that operators that mechanize the tent washing process find that they are able to generate faster inventory turns due to the fact that there is no delay in returning clean tents to inventory. What's more, those in the tent rental business know that the quality of the tent and its clean appearance are a key component in supporting a quality brand image for the rental company.

Tent Drying

After the tents are thoroughly washed, whether by manual or a mechanized method, its time for drying. It's no secret as to the critical importance of ensuring that all tent material and webbing are thoroughly dry before placing back in inventory. However, some best practices with respect to the drying process may bear repeating.

Two key considerations in the drying of tents is first having a space available for tent drying and second to have a systematic approach to ensuring that all webbing and tent material is thoroughly dried at the end of the process. Many times a tent rental operator lacks sufficient floor space to be able to construct a proper rack system to properly and thoroughly dry tents. Ideally, the physical plant where the drying of tents will take place has tall ceilings, ideally 20 to 30 ft. in height. An effective approach to tent drying is to first make use of large capacity mops to remove as much water as possible from the surface of the tent. The next step is to make use of a rack system that will bear the weight of the heavy wet tent panels. Figure #1 provides a simple sketch of a drying rack that would accommodate up to a 40 ft. panel.

Establishing Effective Tent Washing & Drying Processes

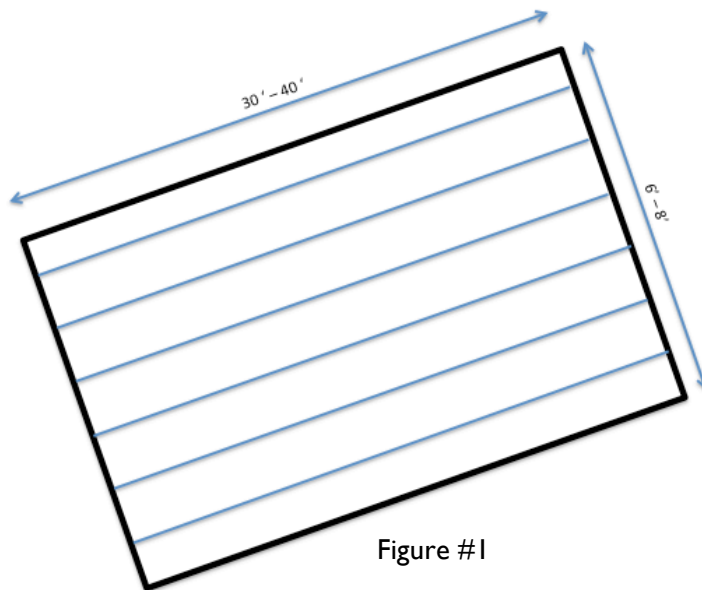


Figure #1

Such a drying rack structure is designed to allow the material to drape in an accordion fold fashion allowing water to drain off the surface of the tent material much like a series of gutters. Ideally such a rack design is supported by the floor and not suspended from the ceiling of the warehouse. If the rack is suspended from the ceiling, it is important to ensure that the system is structurally reinforced such that the ceiling will be able to sustain the weight of the heavy wet tent material. This is particularly important in climates where the winter brings

considerable snowfall. Compounding the weight of wet tent material with the weight of the snow on a roof can create an unsafe situation by creating additional stress on the building structure. Materials for constructing such a rack should be highly rigid and able to sustain the considerable weight of the wet tent material. A rust-resistant metal pipe structure can be very effective. A key point to keep in mind when constructing the rack is to make sure to avoid structural support elements that would allow the wet material to gather pockets of water. Again the intent with the rack system is to allow the ambient air and gravity to work for you in drying the tent material.

Additional consideration in drying tent material is to make the necessary accommodations for the local climate. If the climate tends to have high humidity, the material will take much longer to dry. Many operators in this type of climate have found the addition of dehumidifiers and large fans that draw the air out of the building bringing in more dry outside air to be far more effective than solely blowing air over the material. Commercial de-humidistats are available that sense the zone humidity and trip on the dehumidifiers in the building and can help to bring about optimum drying conditions. In the winter months in northern climates it is best to utilize heaters in the warehouse and keep the temperature of the warehouse at 60° F/15° C or warmer. In addition to the use of large capacity exhaust fans that are momentarily activated by the dehumidistats to draw air through the building, the use of large ceiling fans can add the additional benefits of driving down the warmer air at the ceiling and creating additional air movement across the surface of the tent material.

Establishing Effective Tent Washing & Drying Processes



It is important to note that each building and each climate is unique and what solution works well in one situation may or may not work well in another. It is advisable to contact an expert in the field of climate control and establishing an HVAC environment that will be perfect for your particular tent drying requirements. Teeco Solutions has worked with many tent rental operators and is available to help design an effective tent drying solution.

Commercial Dryers

If warehouse space is an issue, or a tent rental operator is interested in expanding the business without adding considerable square footage to the operations, a commercial tent dryer may be the answer. Over years of careful research and development, Teeco Solutions has developed a large capacity tent dryer that thoroughly dries large volumes of tent material without the risk of shrinkage to the webbing or damage to the tent material. To learn more about Teeco Solutions dryers, visit the web site at <http://www.teecosolutions.com/drying-tents.asp>.

Summary

The proper washing and drying of tent material is a big part of any well-run commercial tent & party rental operation. Considerable time, money and labor is expended and can be saved by properly organizing the tent washing and drying process. What's more the output of the process is ultimately a major reflection of the rental operator's business. A dingy, moldy tent communicates volumes about a rental operator and can jeopardize the future of the business. Likewise on the plus side, rental operators that consistently put out a clean, well-maintained product are putting forth a quality image that supports business growth.

Teeco Solutions is in the business of helping commercial tent and party rental operators mechanize traditional labor-intensive processes to improve operating efficiencies and bottom line profits. Teeco Solutions' line of reliable, high quality tent washers, dryers and work site power equipment is designed to improve operating efficiencies and productivity while improving the quality of products and services delivered. Teeco Solutions is headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri, USA but our long list of satisfied customers can be found around the globe from coast to coast in the U.S. to across the pond in Europe and way down under in Australia. Contact us today for a complimentary assessment of your tent rental operations and let us help you uncover hidden operating efficiencies and profits for your business. We can be reached toll free in the U.S. and Canada at 877.712.9172 or via email at sales@teecosolutions.com. From Europe dial +011-314-968-3555, for European technical sales dial +4670853660 or in the UK dial 02033 569655.