



HEALTHCARE LAUNDRY TOUR

Inspection Guide and Checklist
for Professionals





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Introduction

Based on the standards of Hygienically Clean Healthcare certification, this checklist and guide provide a structured approach for touring a healthcare laundry facility. It highlights key control points in the workflow essential to ensuring the cleanliness of healthcare textiles (HCTs).

Hygienically Clean Healthcare Certified Laundries

When healthcare professionals assess options for linen, uniform, and facility services, every laundry considered should hold the Hygienically Clean Healthcare certification. This certification demonstrates the facility's commitment to best management practices (BMPs) in laundering, as verified through rigorous audits and its proven ability to deliver clean items through ongoing microbial testing.

A facility's dedication to adhering to BMPs for processing linens and uniforms, as outlined in its quality assurance (QA) documentation, is confirmed through thorough audits. QA documentation is the focus of the auditor's evaluations, which assess critical control points to minimize risks.

Facility's must pass three rounds of outcome-based microbial testing, ensuring their processes consistently produce clean items with a negligible presence of harmful bacteria. To maintain certification, facility's must also pass quarterly testing, ensuring that factors such as water quality, textile composition, and wash chemistry do not affect the quality of the laundered items.



TYPICAL WORKFLOW PATTERN

Sorting
Washing
Drying/Finishing
Packout
Delivery/Route

Starting the Tour

The tour typically starts in the area where soiled HCTs are received and sorted and concludes where clean items are loaded for delivery. During the tour, three types of inquiries are suggested for each step:

- **SEE:** Gather visual evidence of equipment, functionality, or documentation
- **INTERVIEW:** Speak with laundry staff to understand how tasks are performed and monitor
- **ASK:** Request specific information, explanations or documentation (some questions may be addressed after the tour)

Questions should be encouraged and welcomed before, during, and after the tour. However, if an interview is required at any stage and no qualified individual is available, it's best to discuss the issue with the tour host and address any "ask" matters on the spot. This is especially important if drivers are unavailable for interviews.

Touring a laundry facility can help build your confidence in its ability to deliver clean healthcare textiles (HCTs). To maximize the value of the tour, it's important to gather as much evidence as possible through demonstrations that showcase the implementation of best management practices (BMPs).

A group of Hygienically Clean Healthcare certified laundries has come together to create this guide and accompanying checklist to help healthcare professionals identify:

- What to look for
- Who to interview
- What to ask about

This guide and checklist streamline the laundry tour process by focusing on key opportunities to observe BMPs that are essential for verifying the laundry's cleanliness – especially when the laundry systems are fully operational.

Questions should be encouraged and welcomed before, during, and after the tour. Be sure to ask the tour host for ample time to inspect the laundry facility and engage in discussions afterward.

Typical Workflow Pattern

Laundry Operations and Management, a primer published by TRSA—the leading association for the linen, uniform, and facility services industry—defines laundry workflow as a series of consecutive functions:

1. Sorting
2. Washing
3. Drying/Finishing
4. Packout
5. Delivery/Routes

A tour typically follows the workflow order, starting at the dock or designated area where soiled HCTs are unloaded (the first task in sorting), moving through areas dedicated to the subsequent steps, and ending at the dock or designated area where clean items are loaded onto trucks for delivery. During the tour, it is important to assess compliance with hygiene requirements at each function and ensure cleanliness is maintained as items transition between stages.

EXTRA TIP:
Morning is usually
best for tours



STEP 1: SORTING

The first stage of the tour involves observing where soiled HCTs from customers arrive at the laundry. This part of the process demonstrates how the risk of cross-contamination between soiled and clean laundry is prevented. Is there a separate outdoor dock or designated area for this purpose? If the same dock or area is used for both unloading soiled items and loading clean ones, how are these functions separated?

Typical separation methods include:

- Physical barriers between doors designated for soiled or clean items
- Scheduling loading and unloading to prevent overlap between functions
- Strategic placement of fans to ensure airflow from clean to soiled areas

Pay attention to the cargo area of any trucks backing into the loading dock. Look for the opportunity to observe truck cleaning after unloading soiled HCTs, as this step is necessary before clean items are loaded for delivery. If you cannot witness this cleaning, ask for documentation outlining the procedure.

Also, observe how soiled HCTs are contained. They should be stored in color-coded or labeled plastic bags or impervious laundry bags that can be rewashed. Bags should be properly tied or secured to prevent spillage and ensure containment.

Talk to the drivers and inquire about the procedure for separating clean and soiled items during deliveries and pickups.

Checklist for Step 1 – SORTING

SEE:

- ✓ Functional separation on unloading/loading dock/ area
- ✓ Functional separation in soil processing
- ✓ Sign designating soil processing area
- ✓ Sharps container
- ✓ Containment and handling of regulated medical waste
- ✓ Washload-building
- ✓ Proper use of PPE

INTERVIEW:

- ✓ Drivers (if available)
- ✓ Employees for personal safety awareness
- ✓ Employees for universal precaution compliance

ASK:

- ✓ How trucks are cleaned
- ✓ How soil is contained on the route
- ✓ How functional separation takes place on the route
- ✓ How washload-building scales are calibrated



Soil Processing BMPs

As you move from the dock into the soil receiving area, observe the physical and functional separation. Preventing physical contact between soiled and clean items is relatively straightforward, but maintaining proper airflow from clean processing areas to soiled processing areas (venting outdoors) is more challenging.

In the next stage, soil sorting (where items are categorized into batches for washing), multiple procedures take place. This is a great opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification, and provide feedback.

Functional separation is essential. Hygienically Clean certified laundries do not transport or store clean items in the soiled processing area, nor do they transport soiled items in the clean processing area. Even when a physical barrier divides the two, positive airflow is maintained from the clean to the soiled side to ensure separation.

Observe the presence of a sharps container and look for signs that hazardous materials are handled separately from other waste. For example, some customer bags may contain items soiled from chemotherapy. The laundry should have a written regulated medical waste management plan in place.

Ask the host for the Quality Assurance (QA) manual, which may include this plan. The manual, typically in a binder, or electronic, documents the laundry's protocols for complying with Best Management Practices (BMPs). If the laundry is certified as Hygienically Clean, this manual must include compliance with OSHA's hazard communication rule and other relevant Hygienically Clean requirements.

Talk to soil processing employees. All laundry staff, particularly those in soil processing, should practice universal precautions, treating all human blood and body fluids as potentially infectious for HIV, HBV, and other bloodborne pathogens. Employees should know the personal protective equipment (PPE) required for each task and wear barrier gowns, puncture-resistant gloves, safety glasses or goggles, and face masks.

While PPE can be observed in the soil processing area, it's important to confirm that precautions are taken throughout the laundry. For example:

- **Decontamination Process:** Employees should explain that they remove PPE and wash their hands before going anywhere else in the laundry.
- **PPE Removal Location:** Find out where employees remove their PPE.
- **Vaccinations:** Ask if employees have been offered the Hepatitis B vaccination series, indicating they understand their rights under OSHA's bloodborne pathogens rule and are educated on potential exposure.
- **Hand Hygiene:** Hand washing or alcohol hand sanitizing stations should be easily accessible. Employees should be observed practicing good hand hygiene and know to wash their hands before and after eating, after using the restroom, and when their hands are contaminated.
- **Personal Cleanliness:** Employees should wear clean uniforms and take steps to prevent contamination, such as wearing hairnets and avoiding jewelry.
- **Washload-Building:** Sorting ensures effective cleaning by grouping like items (by weight) for optimal washing. This allows for the proper combination of wash chemicals, mechanical action, water temperature and time. Automated soil-sorting systems build complete loads and convey them to the wash area, but in other cases, items are sorted in soil processing, and load weights are determined in the wash area. Ask the tour guide where this weighing occurs and how the scales are calibrated.

EXTRA TIP:

Look for a caution sign designating the soil area

STEP 2: WASHING

Moving on to the wash area, observe how properly sorted laundry is transported from soil processing to washing, either by material handling equipment like sling bags on overhead rails or manually in carts. While the items are still considered “soiled” during transportation, they will be thoroughly washed once they emerge from the washers.

Washed items typically don’t remain exposed to air for long after exiting the washers, as they are quickly moved toward drying or finishing. In some laundries, washers may be integrated into walls, allowing for items to be loaded on the “soil side” and discharged directly into the “clean side.”

Often, items are unloaded from the washers and immediately sent to dryers, which are typically separated by some distance from the washers, with positive airflow ensuring proper separation.

Observe the time it takes for items to move from the washers to the dryers, and take note of the measures in place to ensure separation during this process. Very few laundries have physical walls between washers and dryers. However, a functional barrier is created by maintaining negative air pressure on the soil side, with ventilation directly to the outside. This negative airflow is achieved through differential pressure.

To verify airflow, look for clear plastic strips, like those used in refrigerated food storage areas, hanging from overhead fixtures like door frames or openings to the soil side. The strips should move toward the soiled side, rather than hanging straight down. Additionally, you may notice idle fans that are only activated when airflow drops below the required levels, as these fans are powered by devices that measure airflow and adjust fan speed accordingly.

Checklist for Step 2 – WASHING

SEE:

- Walls or fans ensuring physical and functional separation
- Proof of airflow from clean side to soil side
- Location of chemical safety data sheets, container labels
- Cart washing equipment/system

INTERVIEW:

- Wash area staff

ASK:

- How washer/extractor loads are timed between machines
- When washer/extractor loading/unloading doors are cleaned
- When wash formula testing occurs
- How carts and slings are cleaned



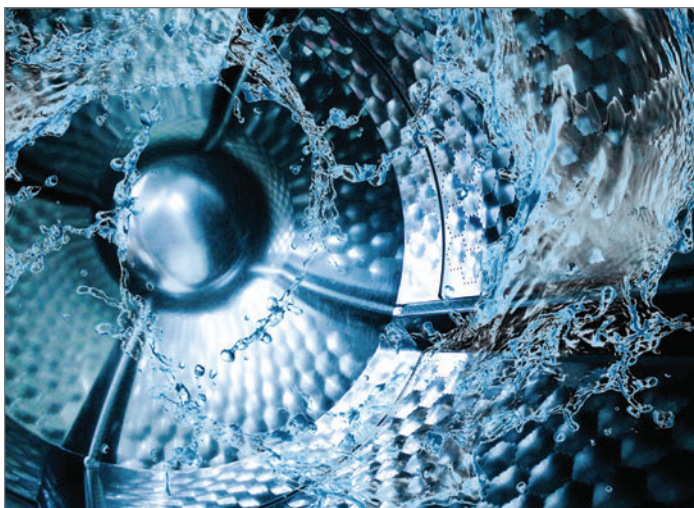
Washer Technology and Separation:

High-volume healthcare laundries often utilize large “tunnel washers,” which consist of multiple compartments. The first compartment (at the opening) is on the soil side, and the last compartment (at the back end) is on the clean side. After washing, items are discharged to a separate unit for water extraction via a spin cycle or compression, before moving on to the drying and finishing stages.

For laundries that process smaller volumes or a wider variety of items, tunnel washers may not be efficient due to the lack of economies of scale. In such cases, “washer/extractors” are used, which are typically placed side-by-side. This setup increases the risk of cross-contamination if washed items are unloaded and soiled items are loaded into adjacent machines at the same time. Ask the tour guide how loading and unloading are timed to minimize the risk of cross-contamination and how frequently washer/extractor loading and unloading doors are cleaned.

Washing Safety:

Ask your guide to show you the laundry’s safety data sheets and container labels, which are required by OSHA’s hazard communications standard. Request the schedule for testing wash chemistry effectiveness and ensure that chemical storage areas are clean, organized, and include current titration reports.



Cart/Sling Cleaning:

An essential aspect of maintaining functional separation is ensuring carts used for soil are properly cleaned before being used for clean items. Most high-volume healthcare laundries have automatic cart washers that clean and disinfect the carts in a car-wash style, ensuring they end up on the clean side. If the facility lacks a cart washer, there should be a designated area with a hose and floor drain for cleaning carts. Ask for a detailed explanation of the cart cleaning procedure, including the disinfectant used and the required drying time before carts can be reused.

Most healthcare laundries also use slings for transporting laundry through both soil and clean processing areas. Inquire about the sling cleaning procedure or confirm that slings used in the soil area are never reused in the clean area. Similarly, for conveyor belts used to transport items, ask about their cleaning schedule to ensure hygiene standards are consistently met.



STEP 3: DRYING/FINISHING

Transition from Wash Area to Drying/Finishing:

As you move from the wash area to the drying/finishing section, you are entering the clean side of the operation. No soiled items should be visible in this area; however, lint buildup may occur, which requires attention to practices aimed at minimizing and removing it.

Evidence of Lint Removal:

At the end of each laundry processing day, lint that accumulates on ceilings, beams, and building columns should be blown down by automated fans or staff using compressed air and high-dusting equipment for collection and removal. Carts should be covered during this process to avoid contamination. Ask for documentation or a policy schedule that outlines when and how this lint removal is performed.

Dryers should have separate lint collectors. You may notice automated lint collectors hanging above flatwork ironers used for large items like sheets and pillowcases. Cloth rolls are used to trap this lint and must be replaced regularly. Lint collectors may also be positioned above small piece folders.

Housekeeping and Quality Control Practices:

Many healthcare laundries employ dedicated staff to sweep or vacuum the area. These housekeeping practices, including blow-down procedures and sweeping/vacuuming at the end of each shift, are often included in the laundry's Quality Assurance (QA) manual.



Critical Quality Control Juncture:

If the laundry has a designated quality control person, they should join the tour in the finishing area to explain the quality control procedures, monitoring, and record-keeping practices.

Check if quality standards and monitoring checklists are posted around the laundry, with visual guides like photos to help employees distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable items.

Look for containers in the finishing areas where stained or torn items are placed, indicating that the laundry takes quality seriously and actively monitors and addresses issues that arise.

Checklist for Step 3 – DRYING/FINISHING

SEE:

- Lint collection equipment
- Employees sweeping or vacuuming and other janitorial duties
- Quality standards posted
- Tables dedicated to assessing quality
- Containers for items rejected for quality issues

INTERVIEW:

- Personnel enacting quality controls
- Employees about their cleaning practices

ASK:

- When, how lint is removed
- How quality is monitored and recorded

STEPS 4 AND 5: PACKOUT & DELIVERY/ROUTE

From Finishing to Packout:

As the tour progresses from finishing to packout, you arrive at the final stage of laundry production, which ensures the quality maintained throughout the previous steps. In the staging and wrapping area, you can observe how items are counted, packed, covered, and stored. Check whether carts are cleaned, lined with bags, and covered before use.

Storage and Inventory:

Examine the storage shelves:

- Is the bottom shelf made of solid, non-porous material and elevated at least eight inches from the floor?
- Are items on the top shelf stored with a minimum of 18 inches of clearance from the ceiling for proper ventilation?
- Do the shelves stand at least two inches away from the wall?

Most healthcare textiles (HCTs) are rented from the laundry, which is responsible for their supply, laundering, and maintenance. However, if your healthcare organization owns its HCTs, ask to see the inventory and discuss how inventory levels are monitored and maintained.

Once items are cleaned, ironed, folded, wrapped, or packaged in carts, observe the storage practices to ensure there is no opportunity for contamination at this final stage.

Loading Dock and Hygiene Practices:

Check if the loading dock is located in a different area of the building from the unloading dock. If drivers are present and this is their first appearance on the tour, take the opportunity to speak with them, particularly if you didn't have the chance to do so earlier in the tour. Refer to Step 1, Sorting.

Look for evidence of proper hand hygiene practices. Are the drivers using gloves and washing their hands properly? Do the trucks have spill kits? Are hand hygiene stations easily accessible throughout the area?

Checklists for Steps 4 and 5 – PACKOUT & DELIVERY/ROUTE

Step 4: Packout

SEE:

- Staging and wrapping areas
- Cart cleanliness
- Storage shelves
- Your healthcare textile inventory (if customer owned)
- How inventory levels are monitored

Step 5: Delivery/Routes

SEE:

- Trucks backed into dock (if available)
- Hand hygiene stations near dock

INTERVIEW:

- Drivers (if available)

ASK:

- Whether spill kits are provided on trucks
- Whether drivers wear gloves
- What hand hygiene protocols drivers follow



AT EVERY STEP

Equipment/Maintenance

Observe the condition of equipment. Are all machines clean and well-maintained? Preventative maintenance plays a crucial role in ensuring smooth laundry operations. Inquire about the protocols and record-keeping processes in place for maintenance.

Check that all areas around the equipment are kept safe. Look for fire alarms, emergency lighting, emergency exits, and equipment guards. If robotics are used, ensure that a perimeter is marked to protect workers. Also, confirm that emergency eyewash stations are available and easily accessible in designated areas.

Housekeeping

Throughout the tour, observe that all equipment and workstations are clean and free of clutter. Look for housekeeping checklists posted on doors or walls. Is a current cleaning schedule maintained and visible?

Ask about the cleaning supplies used and whether they're appropriate for the tasks. For most jobs, EPA-registered disinfectants are required. Inquire about the procedures for cleaning, disinfecting, and chemical use to ensure compliance with proper standards.

Diligence/Competence

Pay attention to how employees carry out their routines and incorporate good housekeeping practices into their daily work. Observe their attention to detail and commitment to maintaining a clean and organized environment.

Look for containers in the finishing areas where stained or torn items are placed, indicating that the laundry takes quality seriously and actively monitors and addresses issues that arise.

Checklist for AT EVERY STEP

SEE:

- Equipment condition
- Equipment safety controls
- Eyewash equipment
- Housekeeping checklists (wall- or door-mounted)
- Employee diligence
- Employee competence

ASK HOW:

- Preventative maintenance is recorded
- Surfaces are cleaned
- Employees are trained to clean



COMPLETING THE TOUR

A tour typically concludes with any remaining questions that are best answered onsite. For example, inquire about evidence that clean items are tested for microbiological content by a third-party accredited lab. It's also important to confirm that the laundry has a pest control plan in place – both of which are essential for a Hygienically Clean certified laundry.

This is also a good time to discuss the laundry's contingency plans. Check the boiler (or energy) room for redundancy in case the primary boiler or air compressor fails. Ask how the laundry would continue to provide HCTs to customers if operations are interrupted due to fire, accidents, or natural disasters. The laundry should have a clear call chain, a list of backup laundries, and a backup source for HCTs.

At the end of the tour, ask yourself: Does the laundry have the necessary policies, procedures, and best management practices (BMPs) in place to consistently produce clean items? Are soiled and clean items adequately separated? Is the environment kept clean and disinfected? Are employees knowledgeable and motivated? If you can answer "yes" to all of these questions, you can be confident that your healthcare facility will receive the clean HCTs it needs, when needed.

Checklist for COMPLETING THE TOUR

ASK:

- Any remaining questions
- If and when items are tested for microbiological content
- How pests are controlled
- How service will be continued in business interruption





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