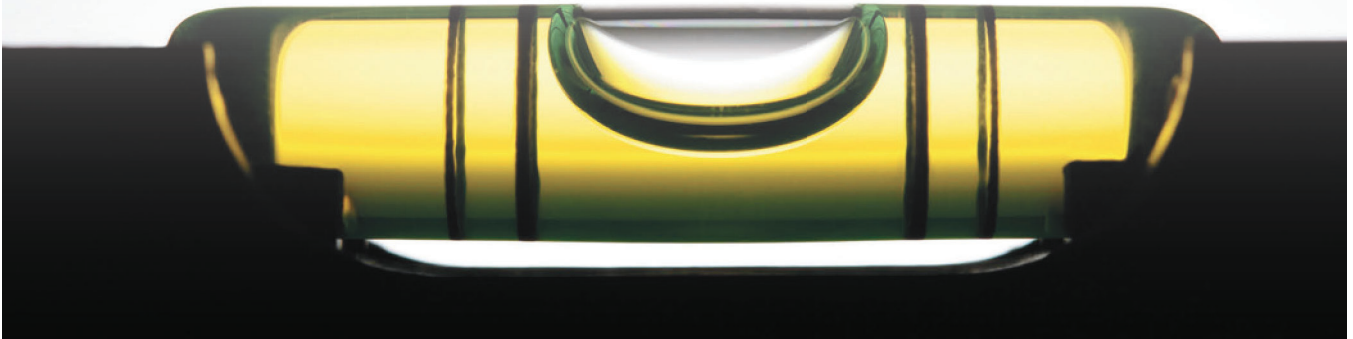


WORKLOADING IN ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Why it is so Important to Your Success

By Karen Hill-Whitson



Workloading is not just an overused industry term. It serves a real purpose and, when implemented correctly, it has a profound positive impact on everyone including the client, front-line staff, middle management, financial overseers, and organization as a whole. Of course, the opposite also is true. If environmental services workloading is not managed appropriately, the negative impact will affect everyone in your organization as well as your clients, and the outcome will be costly in terms of both dollars and reputation.

So why all the hype about this widely recognized terminology and exactly why is it so important to get it right in environmental services operations? Now, more than ever, efficient and equitable workloading is key not only to managing your budget (and we all know we are expected to do more with less these days), but in providing clean and safe work environments within the proposed level of service. Remember, 85 percent of the environmental services operations budget is labor and the rest is equipment and supplies, so having that 85

percent working productively 100 percent of the time is a must. Anything less than that is likely to result in detrimental outcomes.

The Impact of Improper Workloading

So what are these detrimental outcomes and what impact will improper workloading have on an organization relying on a clean and safe environment? Well, let's take a look at some examples. Imagine your organization is an acute health care facility. We will take a look of the impact of poor workloading from the "bottom" to the "top," so to speak. If frontline staff are expected to do more with less and the tasks they are expected to perform, when performed correctly, add up to more hours than they are scheduled to work, that means something in their job routine has to give. We know how this usually goes: either corners will be cut or work will not be performed. In addition, if work is not distributed equitably—and this often is the case—morale of the cleaning staff is affected. So how do you think an overworked employee with poor morale will perform their daily tasks?

Now imagine cleaning tasks not being performed to their fullest extent or with the attention they deserve. We all know what

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can happen next: contaminated surfaces, cross-contamination and, yes, the spread of infectious diseases from patient to patient, across an entire wing or ward of a hospital and, in some cases, across several wings. Now we have the frontline staff impacted as well as the clients/customers who entrust their lives to the organization.

This cost of an outbreak in any institution is extremely high monetarily and in terms of public opinion and reputation as well. The impact makes its way all the way to the "top" or the CEO. If fatalities are involved in this scenario, the impact is far greater and will entail investigations, possibly lawsuits and, of course, the immeasurable gravity of the impact for those who lost loved ones.

Getting It Right

So back to the “workloading” itself. Now that we understand why it is so important, we need to know how to ensure we get it right. There are three parts to this:

1. How do we ensure productivity?
2. How do we ensure efficiency?
3. How do we ensure equitable workloads amongst staff?

There are several tools on the market today (some more comprehensive than others) to assist environmental services operations managers in workloading efficiently and accurately. These software tools have industry time standards for hundreds of environmental services tasks using hundreds of different pieces of equipment built into the software so there is an accurate way to measure the amount of work performed. Associating these tasks with a job routine or employee allows the tool to determine whether workloads are divided equitably.

Productivity can also be measured in the same manner. If one is looking to gain productivity, one could simply and quickly see the impact of swapping out one task for another or one piece of equipment for another.

Back in the day, environmental services operations managers simply relied on their knowledge, know-how, and expertise to determine whether they had their facilities workloaded appropriately. Today, with far more complex work processes, hundreds of cleaning tools on the market, productivity demands from clients and financial departments and, in some cases, industry cleaning regulations, it is much more difficult to determine fair and equitable workloading by calculating it in our heads. We all are turning to technology to make our lives easier and software tools and apps seem to fulfill our needs in many cases. It makes sense there is a tool available to assist custodial managers in managing their cleaning operations. You use technology in other parts of your operations, so why not with staffing levels?

Engaging Management in Your Operations

Since workloading continues to be absolutely critical to the success of environmental services and in creating clean, healthy, and safe environments, it

is imperative that environmental operations managers continue to have conversations about the importance of “getting it right” with their senior leadership team. Management needs to have a vested interest in your operations. They need to understand your business. Your success is their success. When you are presented with the dilemma of “doing more with less,” don’t just say “Okay, we will have to make it happen.” Go back to your senior leadership team and provide them with two or three specific, explicit, and detailed workloading

scenarios along with the accompanying impact reports (which software tools will provide) and *together* make a decision that holds all of you accountable and is one with which you all can live.

It is the age of information, and we can all agree information is power. Bring your environmental services operations to a new level by harnessing the power of technology. ●

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