



# Laundry Tour Planner for Healthcare Professionals

Checklist and Guide



# Laundry Tour Planner for Healthcare Professionals

Based on Hygienically Clean Healthcare laundry certification standards, this checklist and guide plot a sequence for a laundry tour highlighting control points in workflow important to ensuring cleanliness of healthcare textiles (HCTs). A tour typically begins in the area where soiled HCTs are received for sorting and finishes in the space where clean items are loaded for delivery. As many as three types of inquiry are suggested upon arrival in the floor space dedicated to each step:

- **SEE:** Obtain visual evidence of equipment, function or documentation
- **INTERVIEW:** Talk with laundry staff about their individual or team performance related to a function
- **ASK:** Get details regarding functions or request documentation; *“ask” inquiries often need not take place during the visit itself.* Questions should be welcomed and encouraged before, during and after the tour. However, if an interview is warranted at a step and no qualified individual is available to interview, it’s best to ask the tour host about the interview issue(s) and any corresponding “ask” matters on the spot. This is particularly important when drivers may be unavailable to interview.

## 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

## 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

### 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

## 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

## 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

## IN 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

### ASK:

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





## Laundry Tour Planner for Healthcare Professionals

Touring a laundry can build your confidence in its capability to deliver clean healthcare textiles (HCTs). Maximizing the benefit of a tour requires viewing and hearing as much evidence as possible from demonstrations that the laundry implements best management practices (BMPs).

A number of Hygienically Clean Healthcare certified laundries have collaborated to develop this guide and accompanying checklist to assist health professionals in identifying:

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

This guide and checklist facilitate efficient laundry tours by highlighting opportunities to witness BMPs critical to proving the laundry's cleanliness—if a tour takes place when all laundry systems are operating.

**Extra Tip:** Morning is usually best for tours.

Questions should be welcomed and encouraged before, during and after the tour. Ask the tour host for enough

time to allow for physical inspection of the laundry and discussion afterwards.

### Typical Workflow Pattern

*Laundry Operations and Management*<sup>1</sup>, a primer published by TRSA, the linen, uniform and facility services industry's leading association, defines laundry workflow as these consecutive functions:

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

A tour often consists of walking through the laundry in workflow order. The walk starts on the dock or designated area where soiled HCTs are unloaded (first task in sorting), moves onto areas dedicated to subsequent steps, and concludes on the dock or designated area where clean items are loaded onto trucks for delivery. As the tour proceeds, compliance with each function's hygiene requirements, as well as measures to ensure cleanliness as items move between functions, can be checked.

<sup>1</sup> TRSA (Textile Rental Services Association), *Laundry Operations and Management*, 2017, <https://www.trsa.org/product/laundry-operations-management/>



**ABOVE:** An automated system on a mezzanine may be used to sort items into batches of like items for washing; the system fills sling bags that are transported via rail to the wash area.

### 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



## STEP 1: SORTING

The first stage of a tour entails viewing where soiled HCTs from customers arrive at the laundry. This step in laundry processing illustrates how the risk of soiled and clean laundry contacting each other is averted. Is there a separate outdoor dock/designated area for this purpose? If the dock/designated area where trucks arrive is the same one that is used for loading clean items for shipment, how are these functions separated? Typical options:

- Physical barriers between doors dedicated to either soiled or clean
- Loading and unloading is scheduled to prevent overlap between the functions
- Fans strategically positioned ensuring air flows from clean to soiled

Observe the cargo area of any trucks backed into the loading dock/area. There may be an opportunity to view truck cleaning after soiled HCTs have been unloaded, as this is necessary before clean items are loaded for delivery. If there is no opportunity to view such cleaning, ask for documentation of its logistics.

Observe how soiled HCTs are contained. They should be in color-coded or labeled plastic bags or impervious laundry bags that can be rewashed. Bags should be properly tied or secured for containment.

Talk to drivers. Ask about the procedure for separation when the truck is out, delivering clean and picking up soiled.

**Soil processing BMPs.** Moving from the dock into the soil receiving area, observe physical and functional separation. Physical contact is relatively easy to prevent. The greater challenge is maintaining proper airflow from clean processing areas to soil processing areas venting outdoors.

At the next stage, soil sorting (where items are sorted into batches of like items for washing), many different procedures take place. This is an opportunity to ask questions, get clarification and give feedback.

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



### Extra Tip: Look for a caution sign designating the soil area.

Note the presence of a sharps container. Look for evidence that hazardous material is handled separately from other wastes; some bags from customers may contain items soiled from chemotherapy, for example. The laundry should have a written regulated medical waste management plan.

**Ask host for QA manual.** This plan may be included in the laundry's quality assurance (QA) manual, usually a binder, which documents the operation's protocols for complying with BMPs. (This is a requirement if the laundry is certified as Hygienically Clean: OSHA's hazard communication rule<sup>2</sup> and other Hygienically Clean requirements are in the manual<sup>3</sup>).

**Talk to soil processing employees.** All laundry employees, especially those in soil processing, practice universal precautions, treating all human blood and body fluids as if they were known to be

infectious for HIV, HBV and other bloodborne pathogens. Employees should know what personal protective equipment (PPE) is required in each function to guard against contamination and should be wearing barrier gowns, puncture-resistant gloves, safety glasses/goggles and face masks.

While employees can be viewed wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) in the soil processing area, they need to be questioned to be sure they take precautions at other times:

**Decontamination process?** They should explain that they cannot go anywhere else in the laundry without removing PPE and washing their hands. Find out where they remove their PPE.

**Properly vaccinated?** Ask them if their employer has offered them the Hepatitis B vaccination series. This is a good indicator they are educated about their rights under the OSHA bloodborne pathogens rule<sup>4</sup> and they understand their potential exposure.

**Hand hygiene?** Hand washing or alcohol hand cleaning stations should be easily accessible. Employees can be observed practicing good hand washing techniques. They should know to wash their hands before and after eating, after restroom use and when their hands are contaminated.

**Personal cleanliness?** In soil processing and throughout the laundry, employees should be appropriately dressed for healthcare laundry (clean uniforms) and pose negligible risk to contaminate items (hair nets, jewelry, etc.).

**Washload-building.** Sorting ensures optimal cleaning by uniting an appropriate amount of like items (by weight) in a load to be washed properly—using a specific combination (formula) of wash chemicals, mechanical action and water temperatures for a set period of time. This enables effective laundering to occur. Automated soil-sorting systems build loads completely in soil processing and convey them to the wash area; in other cases, items are grouped in soil processing, but load weights are determined in the wash area. Ask the tour guide where such weighing takes place and how scales are calibrated.

2 OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), *Hazard Communication*, 29 CFR 1910.1200, <https://www.osha.gov/dsg/hazcom/>

3 Hygienically Clean Healthcare, *Standard for Producing Hygienically Clean Reusable Textiles for Use in the Healthcare Industry*, 2018, <http://hygienically-clean.org/hygienically-clean-healthcare/>

4 OSHA, *Bloodborne Pathogens*, 29 CFR 1910.1030, [https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/bloodborne/pathogens/bloodborne\\_quickref.html](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/bloodborne/pathogens/bloodborne_quickref.html)





**ABOVE:** Tunnel washers handle high volumes of the same item, discharging to a separate unit for extraction of excess water; smaller washers handle lower volumes of single items or a wider variety and extract on their own.

### 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

### 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



## STEP 2: WASHING

Moving onto the wash area provides a view of properly sorted laundry having been transported there from soil processing by material handling equipment, such as sling bags on overhead rails, or pushed manually in carts. Items are still “soiled,” however, until they emerge from washers.

Washed items typically are not exposed to the air for very long when they emerge from a washer on their way to drying or finishing. Washers may be built into walls so they can be loaded in the wash area (“soil side”) and discharged on the “clean side.” Items are most often unloaded from washers and immediately go to dryers separated from washers by some distance and protected by positive airflow.

Note how long it takes for items discharged after the wash process to get to dryers and then how separation is ensured. Very few laundries have walls between washers and dryers. As stated earlier, a functional barrier should be created by negative air pressure in the soil side with venting directly to the outside. The negative air flow in the soil side is created by differential pressure.

**Proof of airflow.** Airflow-driving fans’ impact cannot be felt by human skin but this impact can be seen with the human eye. Hanging from overhead (such as a door frame or other opening to the soil side) may be clear plastic strips like those for refrigerated food stockrooms. These should move toward the soiled side, not hang straight down. You may also see idle fans that are used only as air flow drops, as devices are used that mechanically measure air flow and power these fans as needed.

**Washer technology and separation.** High-volume, healthcare laundries are inclined to use large “tunnel washers,” which are made up of multiple compartments. A tunnel’s first pocket (at the opening) is on the soil side and the last pocket (back end) is on the clean side. Items are discharged to a separate unit for extraction of excess water by a spin cycle or compression before moving onto drying/finishing.

Laundries that produce less “bulk” (smaller volumes of single items and/or a wider variety of items) may not have the economies of scale needed to efficiently wash in tunnels. In this case, “washer/extractors” are used.

Washer/extractors are commonly placed side-by-side, creating a higher cross-contamination risk. If washed items are unloaded and soiled items are simultaneously loaded into an adjacent machine, there is no functional separation. Ask the tour guide how loading and unloading is timed to minimize cross-contamination risk and how cleaning washer/extractor loading and unloading doors is scheduled.

**Washing safety.** Ask your guide to point out the laundry’s use of safety data sheets and container

labels required by OSHA’s hazard communications standard. Ask for the schedule for testing that ensures effective wash chemistry. Chemical storage should be clean and organized with current titration reports.

**Cart/sling cleaning.** A critical component of functional separation, cart washing requires an effective system to prepare carts used for soil to handle clean items. Most often, high-volume laundries dedicated to healthcare have automatic cart washers. Carts move through in a car-wash fashion and are cleaned and disinfected and end up on the clean side.

A laundry without a cart washer may have a separate area with a hose and floor drain for cleaning carts. Get a clear explanation of how carts are cleaned, including type of disinfectant used and length of drying time required before reuse.

Most healthcare laundries use slings for transporting laundry in the soil or clean processing areas or both. Ask about the sling cleaning procedure or confirm slings used in soil processing are never used in clean processing. Similarly, where items are carried by conveyor belts, ask about their cleaning schedule.

**BELOW:** Automatic cart washers move carts through in a car-wash fashion so they end up on the clean side of the laundry; chemical storage includes safety data sheets and OSHA-required container labels.



**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

**BELOW:** Most dryers have their own lint collectors; ironers and folders may have their own.



## STEP 3: DRYING/ FINISHING

Leaving the wash area and arriving in drying/finishing is the gateway to the clean side of the operation. No soiled items should be visible in this area, but lint accumulates there, calling attention to practices to minimize and remove it.

**Evidence of lint removal.** When laundry processing is completed for the day, accumulated ceiling, beam and building-column lint is blown downward by automated fans or employees using compressed air and other high dusting equipment so it can be collected and removed from the floor. Carts are covered during this procedure. Ask for the policy, schedule or some type of documentation that this takes place.

Dryers have separate lint collectors. You may see automated lint collectors hanging over flatwork ironers for sheets, pillowcases and other large piece items. Cloth rolls trap this lint and must be changed periodically. Collectors also are sometimes mounted above small piece folders.

Many healthcare laundries use dedicated employees to sweep or vacuum. Housekeeping policies and training, such as those related to blow-down and sweeping/vacuuming at the end of each shift, are often found in the QA manual.

**Critical quality control juncture.** If the laundry has a dedicated quality control person, that individual should join the tour in the finishing area. Have them explain quality control procedures, monitoring and record keeping.

Are quality standards and monitoring checklists published and posted around the laundry? Photos can guide employees to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable items.

Look for containers in the various finishing areas for stained or torn items or those that need to be rewashed. This indicates the laundry operator takes quality seriously.



## 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



## STEPS 4 & 5:



## PACKOUT & DELIVERY/ROUTES

Moving along the tour from finishing to packout reveals the final stage of laundry production, which preserves quality from every previous step of the process. Viewing the staging and wrapping area reveals how items are counted, packed, covered and stored. Are carts cleaned, lined with a bag and covered?

**Storage and inventory.** Observe storage shelves. Is the bottom shelf made of solid nonporous material and at least eight inches from the floor? The top of any item on the top shelf should be a minimum of 18 inches below the ceiling for proper ventilation. The shelves should stand about two inches from the wall.



**Extra Tip:** Porous material such as paper or cardboard should not be used as shelf liner.

Most healthcare textiles (HCTs) are rented: owned by the laundry, which is responsible for supplying, laundering and maintain them. If your healthcare organization owns its HCTs, ask to see this inventory and discuss how inventory levels are monitored.

Once clean items are washed, ironed or folded, then wrapped or packaged in carts and covered, look at storage practices to confirm there is no last-minute chance for contamination.

Is the loading dock in a different part of the building than the unloading dock? If so, and drivers are present, this is another opportunity to talk to them, especially if they were not present at the beginning of the tour. See Step 1, Sorting.

Look for evidence they use gloves and wash their hands properly. Do trucks have spill kits? Are hand hygiene stations readily available?

**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



## IN EVERY STEP

### EQUIPMENT/MAINTENANCE

**Observe equipment condition.** Are all machines clean and do they appear to be well-maintained? Preventative maintenance is a vital part of laundry operations. Ask about protocols and record keeping.

Are all areas around the equipment kept safe? Look for fire alarms, emergency lighting, emergency exit access and equipment guards. If the laundry uses robotics, a perimeter should be marked to protect workers. Is emergency eyewash equipment available with unobstructed access in designated areas?

### HOUSEKEEPING

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

Inquire about cleaning supplies and proper use; for most tasks, EPA-registered disinfectants are required. Ask about procedures for cleaning, disinfecting and chemical use.

**Diligence/competence.** Observe how employees go about their routines and incorporate good housekeeping procedures.

**BELOW:** Effective counting and packing preserves quality from every previous step of the laundry process.





**ABOVE:** All equipment and work stations are expected to be clean and free of clutter and all areas around equipment kept safe.

### ASK:

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



## COMPLETING THE TOUR

A tour usually ends by asking any remaining questions best answered onsite such as an inquiry regarding evidence that clean items are tested for microbiological content by an ISO-certified lab. Also determine that the laundry has a pest control plan. These are musts in a Hygienically Clean certified laundry.

It's also the time to raise the subject of the laundry's contingencies. Look in the boiler (or energy) room; is there duplication in case the primary boiler or air compressor breaks down? Ask how, if the entire laundry is interrupted (fire, accident, natural disaster), customers will continue to receive the HCTs they need. The laundry should have a call chain, list of backup laundries and backup source of HCTs.

At the end, ask yourself: Does the laundry have the right policies, procedures and best management practices (BMPs) in place to consistently produce clean items? Are soiled items adequately separated from clean items? Is the environment clean and disinfected? Employees are knowledgeable and motivated? All answers must be "yes" to maximize certainty that your healthcare facility receives the clean HCTs you need when you need them.





## Hygienically Clean Healthcare Certified Laundries

When healthcare professionals review options for linen, uniform and facility services, every laundry under consideration should be Hygienically Clean Healthcare certified. The certification reflects laundries' commitment to best management practices (BMPs) in laundering as verified by inspection and capability to produce clean items as quantified by ongoing microbial testing.

A laundry's dedication to compliance and processing linens and uniforms using BMPs as described in its quality assurance documentation (QA) is confirmed by inspection. QA is the focus of inspectors' evaluation of critical control points to minimize risk.

Laundries pass three rounds of outcome-based microbial testing, indicating that their processes are producing clean items and negligible presence of harmful bacteria. To maintain certification, laundries must pass quarterly testing to ensure that as conditions change, such as water quality, textile fabric composition and wash chemistry, laundered item quality is consistently maintained.