



# Hygienically Clean: Q&A With Angela Freeman

TRSA's certification programs manager answers questions about TRSA's Hygienically Clean initiative

By Jack Morgan

TRSA's Hygienically Clean certification program for healthcare and other laundries provides a system—including microbial testing of textiles—that helps ensure that the reusable goods coming out of these laundries don't contribute to infections acquired in healthcare institutions, such as hospitals and clinics. The program, rolled out last year, has generated significant interest among textile services organizations, along with questions about this initiative. *Textile Services* recently sat down with Angela Freeman, TRSA's director of certification programs, to help clarify how the program works, and explain why it offers a better alternative for ensuring the production of

hygienically clean textiles. A series of questions and answers appear below:

**Q: How many plants currently are going through initial testing to certify with the Hygienically Clean program?**

**A:** Fourteen plants are now going through the testing process.

**Q: How do applicants react when you discuss the costs of the program?**

**A:** Most applicants understand the cost of certification. Very few question the fees, and when they do it's usually to get a better understanding

of the breakdown. They also are interested in seeing what the certification costs are for nonmembers of TRSA. They like to know the cost to compete in their markets.

**Q: When you handle inquiries, what percentage of them eventually end up applying? Why?**

**A:** We get many inquiries, but most are specifically related to testing, and whether they will be able to pass the test. There are more plants currently testing products than have submitted applications. Once they get a couple of passing results, they are eager to submit their applications. We actually recommend that plants test their items prior to submitting their applications so they can have an understanding on what they would face during the certification process.

**Q: As applicants move toward certification, do they say they are challenged by outside organizations (CDC, Joint Commission, etc.) over any aspects of the standards?**

**A:** Most applicants are very comfortable that Hygienically Clean meets

or surpasses all of the requirements set forth by CDC, Joint Commission, etc. The biggest challenge they face is properly marketing Hygienically Clean, since it's relatively new to the industry. Applicants are confident that Hygienically Clean is the way to go for assuring their clients that the products they provide are both safe and clean.

**Q: Typically, how long does it take to go from application to certification? Why does this factor vary for different applicants?**

**A:** Certification timelines for Hygienically Clean vary, based on testing results. To ensure that the products are clean and the processes are consistent, Hygienically Clean requires plants to pass microbial testing three months in a row. All results are reviewed with the plants. If results exceed the determined limits, plants often go back and make adjustments to their wash process, or wash formulas, to ensure that they can meet the standard for certification.

Hygienically Clean testing leads to improved performance as it alerts plants to cleanliness concerns they may not have been aware of.

**Q: Is it typical for companies not to meet the initial testing requirements? If so, why?**

**A:** I wouldn't say it's typical; many pass the initial testing requirement, but fail the second time when submitting. Upon reviewing results with plants, they often submit samples for testing prior to the completion of the entire wash process. Items submitted for testing should come from the end of the line, as if they were going to be delivered to customers.

**Q: How would you describe the difference between TRSA's bacterial measurement (cultured) as opposed to the more superficial variety that healthcare industry buyers are more familiar with?**

**A:** We use the USP 61 test for the Total Aerobic Microbial Count, which includes objectionable organisms that grow in oxygenated environments, such as:

- The bacteria *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*)
- The bacteria *Staphylococcus aureus* (*S. aureus*)
- The yeast *Candida albicans* (*C. albicans*)
- The bacteria *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (*Ps. aeruginosa*)
- The fungus *Aspergillus niger* (*A. niger*)

We ensure that these and other microorganisms are minimized, so that laundry produced in a Hygienically Clean certified plant does not lead to healthcare-associated infections. Many other tests have focused on new devices like ATP testers, which work well on hard surfaces, but are not very reliable when it comes to porous substances like textiles.

**Q: How responsive are the labs that perform the tests; why are we using certain ones?**

## Members' track record in meeting requirements

Company	Application Date	Date Certified
Ameripride Twin Falls, ID	8/21/2012	11/7/2012
Mediclean/Service Linen Supply	6/14/2012	3/1/2013
Northwest Health Care Linen	10/22/2012	3/7/2013
Faultless Laundry Co. Kansas City	11/29/2012	3/8/2013
Faultless Laundry Co. Brooklyn	11/29/2012	3/8/2013
Ameripride Minneapolis	1/03/2013	3/21/2013
Ecotex Healthcare Linen Service/NM	5/18/2012	3/25/2013
Ecotex Healthcare Linen Service/WA	5/18/2012	3/25/2013
Ecotex Healthcare Linen Service/AB	5/18/2012	3/27/2013
Ecotex Healthcare Linen Service/OK	5/18/2012	4/5/2013



**A:** Each lab uses the same test and the same testing technique. They've administered the test for years and are very meticulous. Each approved lab has great reporting techniques and tools, and they are highly professional and strictly confidential.

**Q: How detailed does the Quality Assurance (QA) manual need to be?**

**A:** The Quality Assurance Manual should accurately reflect your wash process and address the requested requirements outlined in the Hygienically Clean standard. It should be very detailed, as it will be reviewed on-site during a Hygienically Clean inspection.

**Q: When are plants inspected?**

**A:** Inspections occur after a site passes two months of consecutive testing and the Quality Assurance manual is completed. We work closely with the plant's point of contact to schedule a date that works for the plant and the inspector. The inspection must occur prior to certification for plants that aren't already accredited by the Healthcare Laundry Accreditation Council (HLAC). Our inspector visits the facility and selects the final items to be tested from the end of the line. Currently, HLAC plants are given a pass on the inspection until recertification. That clause may be expiring soon.

**Q: Why is Hygienically Clean Healthcare equally appropriate for textile services operations that serve hospitals as those that serve ambulatory care facilities?**

**A:** Ambulatory Care facilities as well as hospitals use reusable linens to care for their patients. The Hygienically Clean program is appropriate for any facility

that uses reusable healthcare linen as part of their daily operations. We follow healthcare product cleanliness requirements and laundry management practices that are aligned with OSHA regulations and standards established by the following governing bodies to ensure the production of safe and clean laundry:

- American National Standards Institute (ANSI)
- Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation (AAMI)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- The Joint Commission (TJC), formerly the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO)

**Q: What are the key differences between the HLAC's approach as opposed to Hygienically Clean? Is Hygienically Clean a substitute for HLAC, or a complement? Why?**

**A:** The International Standards Organization (ISO) emphatically states that certifications of processes do not reflect product quality. Only if a product itself is subjected to a certification standard can the product label or package be embellished with a certification conformity mark. Thus, a laundered product cannot be considered hygienically clean if only the laundering process is certified.

Here's the key difference between Hygienically Clean and HLAC: Our certification doesn't rely solely on verifying a plant's process. We review and inspect the process, but we go a step further and certify the product. Hygienically Clean can complement an HLAC certification, but due to the

biological-testing component, it's a standalone certification that meets and exceeds the HLAC certification. The only benefit that HLAC has over Hygienically Clean at this time is brand recognition.

Additionally, all Hygienically Clean-certified plants must continue to submit items for microbial testing. Every six months, items are submitted to ensure that they continue to meet or exceed the microbial testing limits. If there is an issue, they risk losing their certification. The Hygienically Clean program ensures that plants continue to process and produce safe and clean laundry throughout the three-year certification period.

**Q: What percentage of Hygienically Clean applicants also are HLAC accredited?**

**A:** 59% of applicants are HLAC; 80% of certificants are HLAC

**Q: Can you envision any plant having to invest capital to become Hygienically Clean? Many plants read our standard, and they evaluate where there may be differences in what we require and what they currently have.**

**A:** We have an industry expert on-site to provide guidance in those cases, and yes from time to time, plants have to make adjustments to their processes and sometimes to their facilities to meet the standard. Is it a worthy investment? Absolutely! When they are able to compete for and secure accounts that they were not able to get before, they understand the benefit that a Hygienically Clean certification brings. **TS**

Jack Morgan is editor of Textile Services. Contact him at 877.770.9274 or [jmorgan@trsa.org](mailto:jmorgan@trsa.org).

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- Clean Show Follow-up: How To Maximize ROI
- Who's Showing What at Clean?
- Detachable Map of Clean Show floor, with vendor listings, TRSA schedule of events and more!

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