



**CORRECTIONAL  
LAUNDRY  
PLANNING FILE**



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# Renovation improves atmosphere in prison laundry

Renovating a laundry is expected to bring improvements. Increasing productivity, reducing energy consumption, and improving conditions are the name of the game when planners set about to upgrade a laundry.

However, for Central State Laundry at Manning Correctional Institution in Columbia, SC, the laundry renovation had additional ramifications. The addition of some new equipment had a positive effect on the inmates and the laundry's total work program.

As one of the 12 self-supporting enterprises or industries within the South Carolina Department of Corrections, the central laundry supplies almost 5 million pounds of linen annually to three hospitals within the state's Department of Mental Health and to several institutions in the Department of Corrections. Ray Smith, director of laundry services, reports that the laundry just signed a new contract with the Department of Mental Health, which accounts for about 85% of the plant's production.

Clean linen is produced by about 90 inmates between the ages of 17 and 23, while about 20 more inmates work in supportive roles, such as maintenance. The laundry also has seven civilian employees—six supervisors and Smith.

"Because of their ages, most of the inmates have never held a steady job and haven't known the basics of going to work in the morning," Smith explains. The first thing we want to show them with this program is how working here is like working in the outside world, and how the training and work experience they get can be used to their advantage when they're released. Here, in the laundry, we can teach them something."

The laundry operates as a business, paying its own operating expenses and salaries by establishing and maintaining

during the next few years, it may even seek work from outside sources, Smith adds. "Our goal isn't just to keep the guys busy, it's to run the laundry like an outside business with trained employees, and to save the state money by supplying a service below the normal rate."

When the laundry was originally built, it had a capacity of about 10 million pounds a year, but over the years, a combination of administrative and mechanical neglect had allowed the equipment to run down and created a negative atmosphere in the laundry. "When I got here two years ago, the tension in the air was so great you could cut it with a knife," Smith says.

One of Smith's first steps to correct this situation was to restructure the duties of the civilian supervisors to a more hands-on approach of management. He also created an inmate council, call the "Floorwalkers Association", which is made up of inmates with good work records. They serve somewhat like lead men in various areas of the laundry.

According to Smith, the installation of new equipment provided a somewhat unexpected response from inmates last fall. "It had the biggest positive result I've seen," he says. "Inmates saw that this wasn't cheap equipment, but it was the best. Sure, we might have saved money on other equipment, but it wouldn't have been worth it. I believe they saw how serious we are about the laundry, and they consequently take care of the equipment because of its value. Before, they didn't care if or why equipment was down."

Working the laundry is not mandatory and is, in fact, somewhat competitive since it pays the highest rate in the state's Division of Industries--\$16.75 every two weeks. "That may not sound like a lot of money, but it is in this situation", he says.

“The first thing we establish with new workers during orientation is that it’s a no-nonsense operation. This discipline is followed by equipment training and with other tangible training such as bringing in outside speakers. Also, our Floorwalkers Association is a positive incentive to employees since its members are inmates who have worked themselves up within the system and have supervisory positions of responsibility. Once inmates see there is something to learn and gain, they see that things are different here and attitudes change,” Smith notes.

Not only did the addition of some new equipment make the laundry more positive program in the 500-inmate facility, but also the installation provided an unexpected plus. One worker, an inmate who had been trained there as an electrician did such an outstanding job that the company that handled the installation offered him a job. He has worked with them since his parole last March.

“This, more than anything we could have verbalized, has stuck in the minds of the inmates—that this young man had come into the system with no sense of directions and left with a job offer in his hand. This caused inmates to realize that if they do the work and continue to make positive steps, they too can find jobs,” Smith reports.

The start of the renovation program also drastically improved quality and opened the door to an expansion of production. “With the renovation, our capacity is actually 7.5 million pounds annually. Our goal is to expand services within both the mental health and correction areas of the state. We want all of their business, and why shouldn’t we? We have a fantastic operation and a good product to offer,” Smith says.

Currently the laundry handles only linen and the denim-type work clothes issued by the Department of Corrections. The first phase of the renovation program included the installation of four 700 lb. washer-extractors, two 450 lb. steam heated dryers, and a steam

tunnel. The laundry retained two of its old 1200 lb. washers, a 300 lb washer, four extractors, several older dryers and six 8-roll steam ironers. Smith hopes to replace most of the older equipment during the next three to four years. “The first order of business has been to get back on track in a plant that had been built and equipped in 1962. The rest of the renovation hinges on our ability to attract more business due to our quality.”

The equipment also has reduced water consumption by two-thirds. The laundry can load to the maximum weight and still produce the quality level that Smith has set. Also, “we’ve shortened our cycle time by at least 25%.”

“Keep in mind that we are not running new linen. The replacement program is not anything like you’d see for a regular operating hospital that charges \$150 a day for a room,” he notes. “What we now have is the ability of maintaining older low-tensile linen to the point that it’s very acceptable.”

Not all facilities served by the laundry are located near the plant. In fact, two of the institutions are in downtown Columbia. To service them, the laundry has its own fleet of trucks. Deliveries are made by two tractor-trailers, an 18 ft. truck, or a van. These vehicles are driven by inmates who are usually nearing the end of their sentence and have reached a level of trustee, Smith explains. Also, many of these drivers have received their training through one of the prison’s facilities, so they also have gained some skill that could help them later.

Smith adds that the entire laundry operation is usually supervised by one of two guards. They are there primarily to breakup fights and watch for drug smuggling. However, these problems have declined drastically as the working conditions have improved. For example, Smith reports that when he took over the plant, it was not unusual to have one or two fights per week.

Now, there has not been a fight in the laundry in more than six months.

Smith contends that this is due primarily to the improved working conditions, which makes the laundry a place where the inmates want to work and don't want to endanger that position. Although the turnover is still high—about 140% to 160%-- much of this is due to reassignment to other facilities and, of course, attaining parole or the end of their term.

“If more automated equipment is purchased, we would simply have to shift people to other areas, such as sorting. Because of the prison setting and the fact that we must remain labor-intensive to offer as much training to as many inmates as possible, we need additional poundage if the rest of the laundry is to be brought to today's standards,” Smith notes. The first stage of the renovation is helping him achieve this goal, and is apparently having the desired results in the inmate retraining program.



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# CORRECTIONAL WASHER-EXTRACTOR CAPACITIES

	weight	MILNOR	MILNOR	MILNOR	MILNOR	MILNOR	MILNOR	MILNOR	MILNOR	MILNOR	MILNOR
	in	25 lb.	35 lb.	40 lb.	45 lb.	60 lb.	80 lb.	100 lb.	140 lb.	160 lb.	275 lb.
	lbs.	models	models	models	models	models	models	models	models	models	models
Bed sheets (single)	1.43	17	24	28	31	42	56	70	98	112	192
Pillow covers	0.23	109	152	174	196	261	348	435	609	696	1196
Blankets	2.33	11	15	17	19	37	34	43	60	69	118
Bed pads	1.62	15	22	25	28	43	49	62	86	99	170
Pillows	1.4	18	25	29	32	43	57	71	100	114	196
Bath towels	0.45	56	78	89	100	133	178	222	311	356	611
Hand towels	0.19	132	184	211	237	316	421	526	737	842	1447
Wash cloths	0.06	417	583	667	750	1000	1333	1667	2333	2667	4583
Pants	1.01	25	35	40	45	59	79	99	139	158	272
Shirts	0.49	51	71	82	92	122	163	204	286	327	561
Entry mats (36x30)	0.57	44	61	70	79	105	140	175	246	281	482
Cleaning rags	0.16	156	219	250	281	375	500	625	875	1000	1719
Mop heads 12"	0.5	50	70	80	90	120	160	200	280	320	550
Mop heads 24"	1.1	23	32	36	41	55	73	91	127	145	250

*These figures are based on sample items. Weights and sizes of some brands differ, and therefore the figures should be used only as guidelines*

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