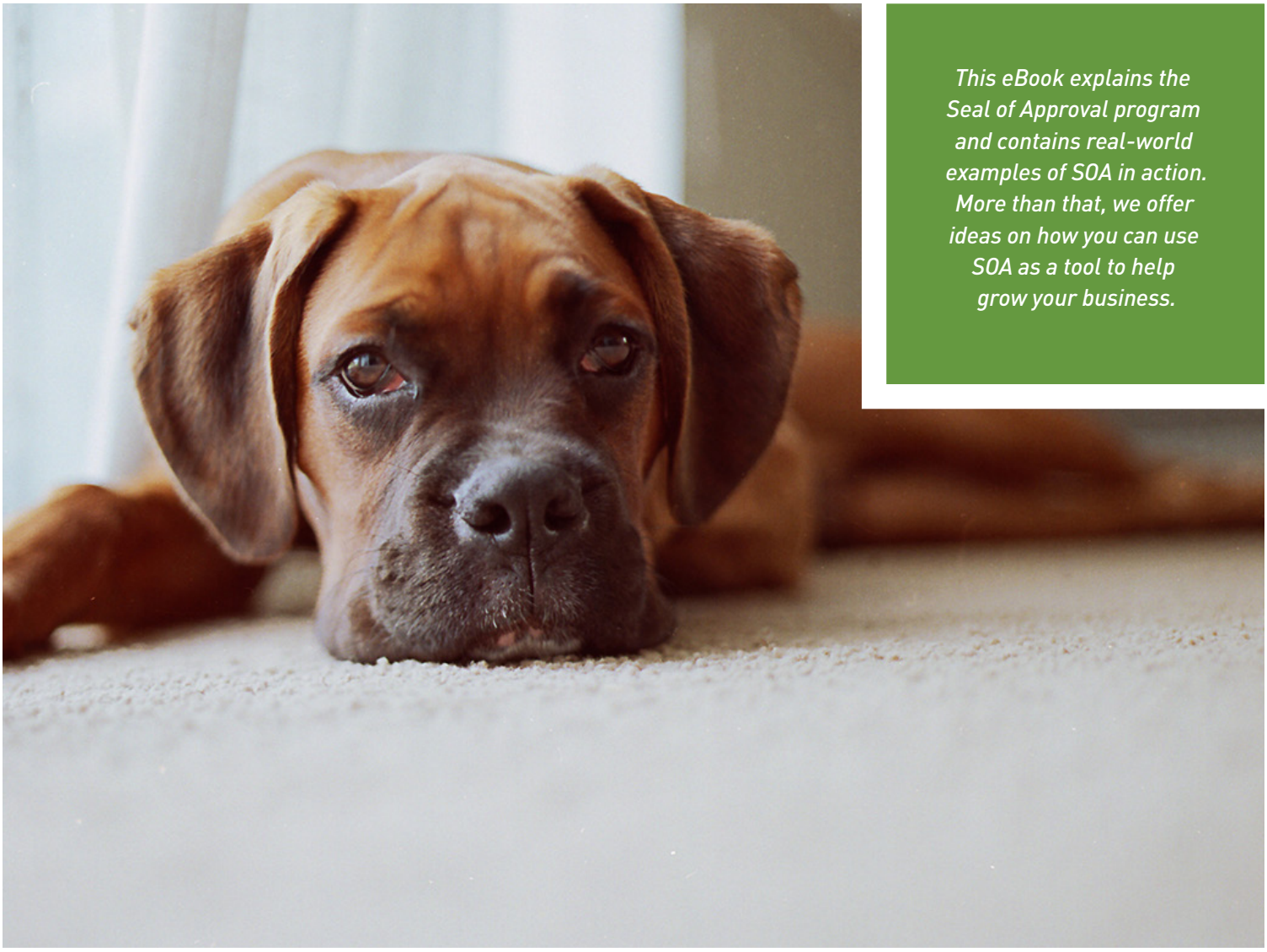
• SOA Certification • SOA in the Real World • SOA Testing Standards

THE CARPET AND RUG INSTITUTE

THE CARPET CHRONICLES

CRI'S SEAL OF APPROVAL PROGRAM



This eBook explains the Seal of Approval program and contains real-world examples of SOA in action. More than that, we offer ideas on how you can use SOA as a tool to help grow your business.

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Why CRI started the Seal of Approval (SOA) Program

The Carpet and Rug Institute's Seal of Approval (SOA) program is a suite of testing protocols that ensure professional cleaners and consumers they are getting the best available products to maintain their carpets.

The SOA program includes tests for vaccum cleaners, extractors and cleaning systems, as well as carpet spot removers, pet stain and odor removers, in-tank and pre-spray cleaning products. The cherry on top is the list of SOA professional service providers who agree to use only SOA products in their work, thus giving consumers a much better chance of being satisfied with their carpet cleaning experience.

Now, one might wonder why the carpet industry would invest heavily in such a program. The answer is relatively simple: when carpet "uglies out" and that signature stain stays around throughout the life of the carpet, it isn't the cleaning chemicals shouldering the blame, but rather the carpet itself. Research shows that the **number one problem people have with their carpet purchases had to do with cleaning and maintaining them.**

In fact, the litmus test which proved SOA was worthwhile occurred during some early testing of cleaning products purchased off the shelf. A majority of the products CRI tested came back as not only ineffective, but most of them actually **did not clean as well as water.** And some even showed a propensity to hurry up the carpet's demise by promoting re-soiling. Some chemicals left behind on the carpet can either strip the carpet of some of its stain resistant properties or even worse become a magnet for soil resulting in those mystery stains that come back in a matter of days.

Carpet is made today to be more stain and soil resistant than ever before. Once we started testing carpet cleaning products and found out how bad some of them really were, we knew that certifying good carpet cleaning products was the right thing to do.

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CERTIFIED TO BE A BETTER CLEAN.

There are seven areas upon which Seal of Approval products are evaluated:

Soil Removal Efficacy: How effective is the product at removing soil?

Resoiling: Does the cleaned sample attract soil at an accelerated rate or not?

Residual Moisture: Does the extractor or cleaning system remove most of the moisture that results from a wet cleaning process?

Surface Appearance Change: Does the product leave the carpet minimally changed after multiple cleanings?

Colorfastness: Does the product cause a change in the carpet fiber?

pH Level: Is the level between 4 and 10 on a pH scale?

Optical Brighteners: Does the product contain optical brighteners? None are allowed for SOA certification.

The knowledge gained through testing is something that we all benefit from: the carpet industry, carpet cleaners, carpet consumers, and carpet solution manufacturers as well. In fact, when we brought carpet cleaning manufacturers and professionals together and introduced this new testing program, we heard a general consensus that it would go a long way in making their products and services better. It would also give them a way to distinguish themselves in the marketplace as using only superior carpet cleaning products that had passed SOA tests.

Since we launched the SOA program in 2004, we have made believers out of a lot of people. Several states require the use of SOA products in their purchasing agreements. With the help of SOA tests, our goal is to ensure that every carpet purchase and carpet cleaning are the best they can possibly be.

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THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE SEAL OF APPROVAL

What are the scientific methods that add credibility to the CRI Seal of Approval testing and certification program for carpet cleaning equipment and solutions? Here how it started and how it works:

CRI has long been interested in understanding how well vacuum cleaners and cleaning systems clean carpet. Since 2000, CRI has worked closely with an independent laboratory to evaluate carpet cleaning machines and cleaning materials.

To gain more insight into the cleaning process, CRI partnered with a company making special analyzers for the U.S. space program. KeyMaster Technologies Inc. in Kennewick, Wash., demonstrated its X-ray Fluorescence (XRF) analyzer.

The instrument quickly determines the identity and amount of chemical elements in many materials. Since each element produces emissions with a specific wavelength and intensity, the analyzer determines the identity and amount of each element in the sample. This technology was a breakthrough for NASA and SOA.

So how do space and rockets translate to cleaning carpets? The XRF device determines to the microgram how much foreign material is removed from carpet after cleaning. Using this technology, CRI's testing laboratory is able to measure the exact amount of soil being removed from the carpet being cleaned, helping us determine what works best and what does not.

CRI's investment in all this science means one big thing for professional cleaners and consumers: There's no need for trial and error and throwing hard-earned money away on products that don't work. If you are looking for a good vacuum cleaner, cleaning solution, deep cleaning carpet extractor, or cleaning system — if it is Seal of Approval-certified — you can be confident of getting something that works.

Because at the heart of CRI's Seal of Approval program is science.

HOW HIGH TEST STANDARDS IMPROVE CARPET CLEANING PRODUCT PERFORMANCE

It is a frequent claim here at the Carpet and Rug Institute that the Seal of Approval (SOA) testing and certification program for carpet cleaning solutions and equipment was developed primarily to increase customer satisfaction with carpet by raising the bar on cleaning performance.

The success of any testing program lies in its power to shape product performance. What good is a standard if everyone can pass it? CRI's claim that "Only the Best Pass the Test", is a statement we stand behind, and CRI touts the benefits of using SOA products and Service Providers in multiple marketing efforts, including the CRI blog. We celebrate every product that passes SOA testing; no more so than when a once-failing product tries again and gets it right.

One of the key players behind the scenes of the Seal of Approval testing program is Professional Testing Laboratories President Gary Asbury. Located in Dalton, Georgia, Professional Testing Labs is an ISO 14025 and NVLAP-certified lab that has provided federally-certified test results for all types of flooring manufacturers since 1988. In 2009, PTL performed more than 3000 batteries of tests, at an average of five tests per battery. According to Gary, PTL prides itself on helping carpet maintenance equipment and chemical manufacturers make better products that result in improved satisfaction for flooring consumers.

Gary says he's seen "dozens of cases" where manufacturers of carpet cleaning products that initially failed CRI's Seal of Approval testing used what they learned from the test results to improve their products' performance to the point where they received a passing grade the next time.

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HOW HIGH TEST STANDARDS IMPROVE CARPET CLEANING PRODUCT PERFORMANCE

Here are some examples from Gary:

"A large commercial cleaning solution manufacturer presented its product to PTL for Seal of Approval testing. The company had been doing its own performance testing on their product – which is commendable of them, but the problem was, they had only been comparing their product against their number one competitor, and the competition's product had a horrible problem with accelerated resoiling. Accelerated resoiling happens when a carpet cleaning solution leaves a sticky residue behind that acts like a dirt magnet.

The first manufacturer's product performed better than its competition in terms of resoiling, but it was a far cry from being at a level that would meet the Seal of Approval requirements.

After receiving their failure notice, the first manufacturer was astounded. But, after looking at the test results and seeing the problem, they went back to the drawing board, and within three months, they had reformulated and passed the testing.

Another time, a huge carpet cleaning retail supplier had a product that failed the colorfastness testing. We'd tested their product on over two dozen fiber types, colors, and constructions of carpet, and the testing definitely showed their product caused a significant color change in the carpet after it was exposed to light. This was a major concern – a big manufacturer with a lot on the line. Within a week of the failure notice, the company sent a private jet to Dalton with five of their top executives on board. In two months the problem was solved.

One more example - several years ago, a fairly high-level executive from a major retail chain visited PTL to look at our testing methods and tour the facility. He was impressed with the lab, and particularly impressed with the Seal of Approval program itself. The day after he left, he contacted every one of his suppliers and told them to submit their products for Seal of Approval testing. It was a powerful testimony to the value of the program."

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CRI SEAL OF APPROVAL SUCCESS STORIES

The Jet Stream Grill

The Jet Stream Grill is a restaurant located in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Quite simply, it was some of the dirtiest carpet imaginable. But an SOA-certified cleaning crew showed how, even in the worst situations, Seal of Approval products and equipment perform beautifully.

The crew vacuumed the entire carpet, then applied an SOA-certified pre-spray. Next, they gave the carpet a thorough going-over with a counter-rotating brush agitator machine. Then they extracted. And agitated again.

So, in answer to the original question we asked ourselves at the onset of this CRI SOA case study - Can This Carpet Be Saved? - the answer is YES!

Dalton Golf and Country Club

Seven years ago, the Dalton Golf and Country Club installed custom carpet, complete with coordinating borders, special colors, and a distinctive medallion with DGCC's logo for the entrance way. However, about five years later, the carpet started looking drab and showed definite traffic patterns. After several unsuccessful cleaning attempts, the regular carpet cleaner told the cub was nothing more he could do – the carpet would have to be replaced.

The club asked CRI for advice. CRI contacted a local Seal of Approval Service Provider who specialized in large-scale commercial cleaning. Not only was the carpet able to be cleaned, thanks to the use of SOA-approved cleaning products, nearly one year later, the carpet still looks great.

Cleaning Carpets at Home

Kristin Smith was a vice president at Ogilvy Public Relations when she played a role in helping launch the marketing of the SOA program. She shared her first-hand experience about using SOA-certified products and service providers.

KRISTIN: For the past five years, I have faithfully promoted the Seal of Approval program, but never had my carpets professionally cleaned.

As I was surveying my cozy home one day, I noticed that my carpet just wasn't looking as good as it once did. I realized that I had committed the number one carpet cleaning foul: not getting my carpet professionally cleaned. I promptly checked out what SOA providers serviced my area and set up my appointment.

Stubborn stains were removed (and haven't come back), my toes once again wiggle comfortably into the carpet pile and my house smells fresh and clean. I've also learned a few lessons. I will start to take my own advice and get my carpets regularly cleaned so I can continue to benefit from the SOA program I talk so much about.

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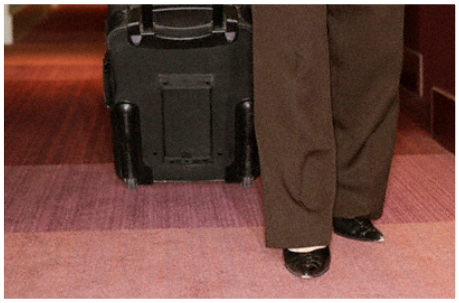

SOA-CERTIFIED PRODUCTS SAVE CARPETS — AND BIG DOLLARS — ACROSS INDUSTRIES.

The following stories come from our brochure, which shows the good and bad of carpet care. We call it the "carpet heroes/carpet killers" brochure, and you can download a copy of it here. The case studies, and the amounts saved, are very real.

Industry: Hospitality

At a Savannah hotel, carpet enjoys an extended stay.

At a five-star hotel in Georgia, 6,000 square yards of carpet was looking worn after just two years, and a significant investment was in jeopardy. Thanks to a new maintenance program, the carpet's look was quickly restored. And the CRI Seal of Approval became a permanent resident.

Money saved: $424,000

Industry: Commercial

A good investment. A decision that saved it.

In a New York office space, 3,000 square yards of cut and loop woven carpet was supposed to last 7+ years. After just one year, it was looking soiled and spotted. With a new CRI-approved cleaning program, significant cost in new flooring, labor and company downtime were saved. And the carpet looked better than ever.

Money saved: $337,000

Industry: Education

In college dorms, it's carpet maintenance 101.

A year after a Minneapolis university had put down 12,000 yards of carpet, it was heavily soiled and was showing dark spots. A far cry from the 12-year life expectancy the school had expected. After a quick lesson on the benefits of Seal of Approval cleaning and maintenance, the carpet was reclaimed and passed with flying colors.

Money Saved: $288,000

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CRI'S SEAL OF APPROVAL PROGRAM GOES INTERNATIONAL

Every now and then, our jobs here at the Carpet and Rug Institute put us in touch with people all over the world. Still, when we opened an email from a company in Sweden, it was a first.

The email was from Jens Wilsgaard, who oversees Quality/ Environmental Services for the Swedish-based company Ångtvättbilen AB, a manufacturer of carpet extractors sold exclusively in Sweden and Norway. Wilsgaard had heard about CRI's Seal of Approval testing and certification program for carpet cleaning products and equipment, and he wanted to see how his company's extractor would fare under the SOA program's rigorous testing.

Several months and a good many emails later, Ångtvättbilen AB became the first foreign-based manufacturer to submit a product for testing, and later the first to earn certification when their machine earned Gold-Level status, signifying superior performance in soil removal, water removal, and texture retention in the SOA program.

SOA testing is always rigorous, but in the case of Ångtvättbilen AB, the laboratory had to purchase special equipment that could perform testing on the European company's extractors, which operate on a different voltage system than we use in the United States.

Ångtvättbilen AB adds their machine to a list of 91 other approved extractors in the Seal of Approval program. The SOA machines are produced by 32 manufacturers, and are all meant to be used in the U.S., except for the Ångtvättbilen AB extractor.

"We decided to ship one of our machines over to the United States for evaluation," Mr. Wilsgaard said, "because we knew that the Carpet and Rug Institute is the main evaluator for carpet cleaning in the world. We wanted an "objective opinion" on the quality of our product and how competitive it would be in the international market. Earning the 'Best in Test' certification helps us, of course, recruit clients who will then hire Ångtvättbilen AB for carpet cleaning."

Everyone here at CRI says, Valkommen!

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CONSUMER GUIDE TO VACUUM CLEANERS CITES CRI SEAL OF APPROVAL

In an article titled, "A consumer guide to vacuum cleaners", Washington Post Local Living writer Jura Koncius offers consumer advice on the best ways to choose and operate a vacuum cleaner and mentions the Carpet and Rug Institute's Seal of Approval vacuum testing program. Jura contacted CRI for the article, and also spoke with SOA participating manufacturer Electrolux. Here are excerpts:

"Vacuum cleaners are the front line of the war against dust. Today's revved-up, dressed-up machines have ways to suck focaccia crumbs out of a keyboard and Afghan hound hair from a sisal rug.

Vacuuming Operating Tips

Dump the dust. In bagless models, empty dirt cups after every use. Change vacuum bags when they are three-quarters full. Never empty and reuse them.

Check the belt. Many uprights need belts replaced every one or two years to maintain optimum power. For details, visit the Vacuum Dealers Trade Association Web site, www.vdta.com.

Keep it clean. Jay Morris of Brothers Sew & Vac suggests wiping out the cavity where the bag sits with a damp paper cloth.

Turn it off. Turn the vacuum switch off before you plug or unplug the machine.

Shop Smart for Vacuums

1. In addition to cleaning power, **consider a vacuum's weight and noise level.** Test it in person, even if you end up ordering online.

2. Consider a model with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) **filter,** especially if any family member has allergies or asthma.

3. If you have a large home, make sure the **hose and cord lengths are adequate.** Allison Duy, a spokeswoman for Electrolux, says, "There is nothing worse than having to keep unplugging."

Vacuums by the Numbers

55 - Percentage of consumers who vacuum two to three times a week.

40 - Average pounds of dust collected annually in a six-room house.

53 - Percentage of consumers frustrated that their vacuums don't clean stairs well.

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GREEN CARPET CLEANING EXPERT OFFERS ADVICE ON CARING FOR CARPET

Building Magazine recently published an article by green-cleaning expert Stephen Ashkin that provides valuable information on green carpet care. The article supports much of what the Carpet and Rug Institute promotes as smart, well-planned carpet maintenance.

Good carpet cleaning is, in and of itself, a green practice, in that it keeps carpet in place longer instead of being pulled up and sent to the landfill. But as the article, **Green Carpet Care**, points out, there are ways to make the process even greener by using more energy-efficient machines and environmentally-friendly solutions.

CRI has just approved the first group of vacuum cleaners under its new energy-efficiency rating that is part of its Seal of Approval testing and certification program for carpet cleaning products and equipment. Products listed as SOA Green have been certified to work effectively and be kind to the environment.

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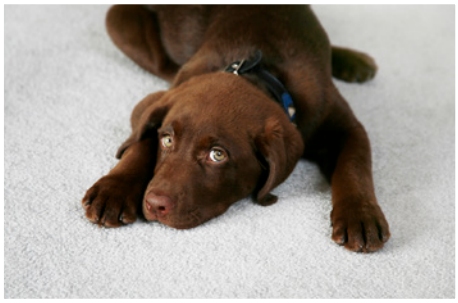

THE LIGHTER SIDE: INSIGHTS, INNOVATION AND INANITY FROM CARPET PROFESSIONALS

We recently asked a group of carpet installers, inspectors and cleaners to share stories of their most unusual or outlandish customer requests. The following compendium of comments reads like a series of one-liners at a joke fest. In some cases, SOA-certified products could have helped. In others, nothing could have saved these customers from themselves.

Pet Problems

From the owner of a carpet cleaning company in the metro DC area:

"About twenty years ago I was cleaning a customer's home and I advised her that her dog was urinating in the house. She told me the dog had never gone in the house! At the very same time, the dog lifted his leg right there in front of us and urinated on my helper's leg. It was all I could do not to laugh."

From a Carpet Cleaner in Oregon:

"We install & clean carpet. We went to a very elderly couple's home to see if [the carpet] needed to be replaced or cleaned as she wasn't sure what was causing such a smell. We take the moisture indicator around & find urine damage behind a recliner chair. She has a little "Fifi" dog so we say, 'Well, it looks like we found out where the dog is having all the accidents.' She cries out, 'OH NO! My little angel wouldn't ever do that. She is so good.' She would not accept any reasonable thoughts about this - so my assistant finally says – 'well, I am sorry to say but it's either the dog or...your husband.' "

From a carpet cleaning company owner in the Boston area:

"Had an upscale customer who decided to have her beautiful Pyrenees dog participate in the son's birthday party. After feeding it chocolate cake (lucky the dog didn't die), the dog decided to pay her back and donated the digested results on her very expensive deep pile white wool carpet. One of the most challenging jobs in 30 years of business. But it was restored!"

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THE LIGHTER SIDE: INSIGHTS, INNOVATION AND INANITY FROM CARPET PROFESSIONALS

Customers Say the Darndest Things

From an inspector in Florida:

"Got one last week from a lawyer I did expert witness work for. He asked me, 'What type of kind of carpet should I get when I own a dog?'"

From Cary Woodfield, a specifier, inspector, cleaner, and carpet services entrepreneur:

"Flew to Tonga to re-dye a spot that someone used a mixture of rust remover and citrus solvent as a spot cleaner."

From the manager of a carpet cleaning business in Georgia:

"I had a lady once ask me if I could spray the walls with my pre-spray.....I respectfully declined."

How about this from a 25-year veteran carpet cleaner from Chicago - sound familiar to anyone?

"Where do I begin? How about the lady who asks you to move a heavy piece of furniture from the 2nd floor to the basement, 'so it will be easier for you to clean the room?' With a straight face, like she thinks she is doing you a favor!"

And this one, from an inspector in Las Vegas, breaks carpet's cardinal rule:

"I can no longer use carpet's oldest one-line joke - "just put it fuzzy side up" - since I was asked to inspect a needle punch, indoor/outdoor carpet glued directly to a balcony upside down."

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PUTTING THE SEAL OF APPROVAL PROGRAM TO WORK FOR YOU.

CRI's Seal of Approval program is designed to do many things: assist consumers in making more informed choices about carpet cleaning products; give manufacturers scientific data that helps lead to better product development; and help carpet manufacturers and owners get the most out of their textile. Did you also know that as a professional cleaner, SOA can help your business?

In your market, there are undoubtedly many carpet cleaners out there. Some are good, some not so good. Besides giving each customer your best effort and reaping the reward of good word of mouth, how can you set yourself apart? Here's where science is your friend.

By using SOA-certified products, you're increasing the odds that your customers' carpets are going to be effectively cleaned. That's something you should tell them about. The Seal of Approval logo is a badge of honor. And for prospective customers, it could make the difference between them choosing you over another cleaner.

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PUTTING THE SEAL OF APPROVAL PROGRAM TO WORK FOR YOU.

To help you in your marketing efforts, we're including a number of links to information your customers may find helpful. Some are about SOA, some are general carpet tips. But feel free to use them on your website, in emails, social media and any other way you see fit.

http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2011/09/what-to-look-for-in-new-carpet-vacuum.html

http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2012/08/tips-for-choosing-caring-for-vacuum.html

http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2013/04/removing-pet-stains-and-odors-easier.html

http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2009/06/carpet-cleaning-tips-for-dummies-get.html

http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2010/04/commercial-carpet-cleaning-and.html

http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2013/05/schools-carpet-maintenance-program.html

http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2010/06/carpet-cleaning-maintenance-for-retail.html

http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2013/04/easy-carpet-cleaning-tips-from-experts.html

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http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2013/07/feature-story-tips-for-housetraining.html

http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2009/12/10-carpet-cleaning-tips-for-holidays.html

http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2011/12/asthma-allergies-carpet-and-flooring.html

Downloadable Fact Sheets

1. http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2011/08/guide-to-cris-seal-of-approval-soa.html

2. http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2011/06/carpet-cleaning-facts-for-school.html

3. http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2011/06/carpet-cleaning-facts-for-architects.html

4. http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2011/05/carpet-cleaning-facts-for-retailers.html

5. http://www.carpet-and-rug-institute-blog.com/2011/06/healthcare-administrators-facility.html

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BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE.

We hope you've found this eBook helpful and informative. But we've got a whole lot more information, if you want it. The CRI Blog is frequently updated and filled with the latest carpet news and trends. Also, you're invited to join the CRI LinkedIn Group for even more great carpet discussion. You can also reach us on Twitter @CarpetRugInstit or through our Facebook page.

The CRI site itself is a great resource for just about anything carpet-related. So don't be a stranger.

Stop by and take a look. When it comes to the #1 choice in flooring, we've got it covered.