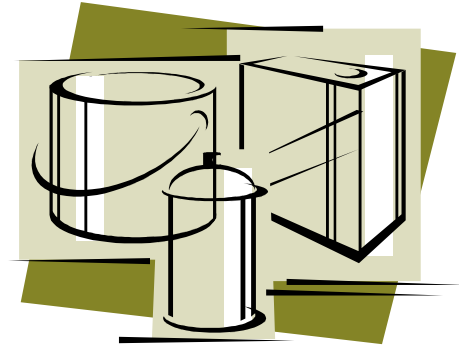


Controlling Cleaning Chemical Costs

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By Maurice Dixon

Whatever mixing system you use, know how to calculate per-ounce costs.



Try these questions: 1) How many ounces in a US gallon? 2) How many ounces in an imperial gallon? 3) How many ounces in a cup? 4) How many ounces in a liter?

Be honest - how many answers did you know?

If you work in the cleaning business somewhere in the US and if you have anything to do with measuring cleaning chemicals, you really should (and must) know the answers to questions 1 and 3. If you do the same in Canada, you should know the answers to 2 and 4.

But before we get to the answers, let's look at some cases: suppose you work in the US and the directions on your cleaning chemical read, "Mix this product 1-10." Or perhaps the directions read, "Mix this product 3 cups to 2 gallons of water." In either case, do you know or does anyone else on your cleaning team really know how to properly mix this product?

No matter what size container you buy, break the cost down to cost per ounce.

Directions?

We have all heard the saying, "When all else fails, read the directions." In the case we've cited above, even if someone reads the directions, I'll bet many still won't know how to mix this product for its best and most effective performance.

If you over-mix your product, it won't work properly and you will spend too much time and too much product to do effective cleaning (the old glug-glug-gulg method has got to go!). If you under-mix your product, it won't work properly and maybe not at all. You end up working harder than you should have to get your job done right.

If you work in Canada and try to mix cleaners packed in Imperial gallons or liters in US-manufactured buckets or pails, you have a whole different problem.

In the Marketplace

Today, the cleaning manager can purchase products in many size containers: from 250-gallon or larger bulk tanks to 55-, 30-, 5- or 1- gallon containers, as well as in quarts, liters and even one- or two ounce packages. You can also buy any number of product systems that are made to mix your cleaner with water automatically. Or you can buy pre-measured amounts of cleaner concentrate. There are computerized propor-

tioners that mix one or more concentrated products, allowing you to make any number of different cleaning products right in your own facility.

But whatever you propose to buy, it all points to one thing: you should set up a standardized system of measuring your cleaning chemicals. Everyone on your cleaning team should be trained in your system. It should be easy to use and easy to understand.

Simple measuring cups work great, and if everyone on the cleaning team knows how many ounces per gallon of water they should use, the cups make it easy. There are also 1- and 2-ounce pumps for use in 1- and 5-gallon containers. There are measuring devices that can be attached to your faucets and, once they are set, meter out the proper amount of product to be mixed with water every time.

Of course, the chemical and equipment manufacturers have an important role in all this. We can ask the chemical people to make it easy to read their directions by, say, stating the ounces per gallon to be used. Machine manufacturers can put graduated gallon marks on machines so you know how many gallons of water you have to work with. And thanks go to those mop and bucket manufacturers who have marked their products in this manner for years.



No matter what size container you buy, break the cost down to cost per ounce.



The “Working Gallon”

But the central question in measuring chemicals remains: What does it cost?

To determine the actual cost of your cleaning chemicals, you really must know the cost of your “working gallon.”

A working gallon is simply a product that is properly mixed and ready to use. The price per gallon of a cleaner concentrate cannot be compared to another cleaner concentrate unless you know the proper dilution ratio and therefore the cost of a working gallon.

Besides the actual product price, there are other costs to be considered, such as the time involved in transferring a product from one container to another, freight, and storage and handling to name just a few. But for now, let’s discuss proper measuring.

One suggestion is to take and inventory of your cleaning products (those that are to be mixed with water) stored in bulk containers. Take your cost per gallon and break it down to cost per ounce - how many ounces of product per gallon of water are you supposed to use?

Then multiply the per-ounce price times the number of ounces to be used per gallon and you will have the cost of your working gallon.

For All Containers

You can do this for any cleaning product, such as

all-purpose cleaners, strippers, germicidal detergents, heavy-duty degreasers and so forth. Do this exercise with the products you have in each of these categories and it will give you some very interesting answers.

(Speaking of answers, it’s about time to give the answers to the four questions at the beginning of this article. They are : 1) 128 ounces 2) 160 ounces 3) 8 ounces 4) 35.2 ounces.)

No matter what size container you buy, break the cost down to cost per ounce. For example, cost per US gallon divided by 128 equals cost per ounce. Besides bulk cleaning products designed to be mixed with water, there are also “ready to use” products normally sold in liters or quarts with trigger sprayers, aerosols or pre-measured packets.

Whatever the type of container the product is in, you can still calculate your cost per ounce for a price comparison. Simply take the cost of the container and divide by the “net weight” printed on the container to arrive at your cost per ounce.

Keep in mind that the price of a product should not be your first consideration. Performance, convenience and ease of handling are other important items. *But if all else is equal, price sure is important.*

Starting a System

You can do some engineer-

ing of your own by pre-measuring plain water into your various cleaning machines, such as extractors and automatic scrubbers. Mark each gallon with paint or tape. This will tell your cleaning staff how many gallons they are working with in each of these containers.

To get started developing a chemical cost-control system, ask your suppliers for help. They all have excellent ideas and products for your consideration and should be more than willing to work with you.

Evaluated various products and systems first from a performance basis; then add in other factor, including price. Once you’ve settled on a product, ask your supplier to help teach everyone the proper use of that product.

Be sure you go over the products’ Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) with everyone. Insist on product literature and document proper product use, instructions and specifications. Keep this information in your files for future reference.

Also, don’t forget to take advantage of charts or dilution tables that have been developed by consultants, professional groups and manufacturers to help you evaluate your cleaning chemical costs.