

Know the Code

Learn the meaning of fabric coding to provide proper cleaning and maintenance information for your clients' new window treatments and accessories.

Question:

In searching for information on cleaning and proper care of fabrics for window treatments for my clients, I am thoroughly confused. In order to properly discuss this subject with my clients, I need help with identifying the codes that appear on the back of the fabric description and content. Please offer some answers to such codes as "W", "S" and "W/S."

Answer:

You are right, codes can be confusing and many times a code is listed, but no explanation of its meaning is provided. Let me give you some definitions of some of the more common codes and some pertinent facts about fabric care and cleaning.

Particular fabric protectants may offer you an easier way to maintain a fabric's look for window treatments and furniture, but be aware that these products are not a substitute to regular care. Follow guidelines closely to provide longer life to your fabrics. The following suggestions will help a fabric stay newer looking longer.

- Periodic light vacuuming or brushing helps remove soil particles and dust to prevent them from imbedding between fibers.
- On upholstery, turn and rotate cushions after vacuuming to prevent excessive wear and soil deposits.
- Avoid placing newspaper on fabric. The ink will permanently stain and discolor the material.
- Professional cleaning will deplete the gradual buildup of dirt and grime, but be aware of any fire retarding finishes that may not last through some methods of cleaning.
- Keep fabrics away from direct sunlight. Lining helps reduce this problem.
- Do not use acids, dyes, paints or nail polish near fabrics.
- Do not cover fabrics with darker fabrics when having work done in the home since dyes may rub off.
- Liquid spills should be absorbed immediately. Blot with white absorbent

- cloth or paper towel.
- Spills such as jelly or soft spills should be scooped up with a soft edge spoon. If it has dried up, scoop it gently and vacuum the rest.
 - Never throw your fabric in the washer or dryer unless the fabric says it's machine washable. Remove the pillow forms for washing.
 - To spot clean, always test an area of the fabric that is not seen first, like the hem or under a chair/sofa skirt. Let it dry, then proceed if the results are positive. Do not oversaturate an area with any cleaning solutions.
 - Do not rub strongly and try not to let a stain dry.

Fabric Codes

- The "W" code refers to fabrics that are man-made. Examples of this category would include nylon, herculon, acetate, olefin and polyester.

Cleaning recommended for these types of fabrics would be to spot clean using the foam from a water-based cleaning agent. This could be a mild soap or detergent or a non-solvent upholstery cleaner. You should always use a clean, dry white cloth or sponge and, as I mentioned before, test an area that is less noticeable first. Blot the area dry and use the cool setting on a dryer to dry once the stain is removed. A fan also may be used. Procedures may vary for upholstery versus window treatments. For example, when spot cleaning a chair cushion, clean the entire surface of the cushion. Follow the directions carefully. If the fabrics have a soil protection treatment or flame retardancy, the procedure may change.

- Fabrics with the code "S" would include those from an organic nature such as cellulosic fibers (from plants) like cotton, rayon and linen as well as materials manufactured from protein fibers (animal origin) like wool or silk. Additional code "S" fabrics would be denim, velour, brocade, tapestry, damask, acrylic and plaid (cotton/olefin blend).

The cleaning procedure for these types of fabrics also would be spot cleaning using a mild, water-free solvent or dry cleaning product. Again, pre-test the product in a less visible area before use and, as before, be sure to not over-saturate, allow the area to dry completely and use a clean, white cloth. Blot out the solution. If the stain persists, rub lightly in a circular motion using a clean part of the cloth. Reverse the circular motion using a clean part of the cloth each time. You also may use the cool setting of a dryer or fan the area dry once the stain is removed. For cleaning a cushion, again, you would clean the entire surface.

- Fabrics with the "W/S" code may be spot cleaned with a mild solvent, shampoo for upholstery or the foam from a mild soap or detergent solution. Techniques mentioned for "W" or "S" coded fabrics should be followed.
- Fabrics with the code "X" should only be cleaned by vacuuming or light brushing. Water- or solvent-based cleaning agents should not be used.

Manufacturers and suppliers are always willing to assist you in defining these codes for their particular products. If you are ever unsure, do not hesitate to contact your sales representative. It is better to be safe when assisting a client with fabric care.

Remember also that aftermarket fabric protectors may change the procedure and results for each category of fabric. For more information on this topic, you also can contact the fabric manufacturer or supplier or the manufacturer of the soil prevention treatment.

The guidelines mentioned here should be verified with each manufacturer as each type of fabric varies in response to cleaning. Using the appropriate treatment and procedure will prolong the life of your designs as well as your relationship with your client.