



# Complaints Survey 2024

**FACILITYCLEANING**  
DECISIONS™

Results of a study conducted by *Facility Cleaning Decisions* magazine • August 2024

# Frustrating Feedback

Survey outlines **common occupant complaints** and how facility managers respond

By Corinne Zudonyi, Editor-in-Chief

Research shows that the average person will complain anywhere between 15 and 30 times a day. Most times, they don't even realize they are doing it. For example, how often does a person complain about the temperature being too hot or too cold. Maybe there's a smudge on the mirror or the toilet paper roll is flipped upside down.

Whether large or small, at their core, complaints spread negativity. In a workplace, this can lead to decreased morale, but it's also been linked to negative health impacts, reduced productivity, and decreased creativity and problem-solving skills.

These are realities no manager wants to hear, but they often can't be avoided. Whether expressing a complaint themselves, or listening to grumbling from staff or building occupants, facility cleaning managers are often involved.

To get to the bottom of common complaints and how to handle them, *Facility Cleaning Decisions* offers up the results of the latest Complaints Study.

## Reviewing the Results

It should come as no surprise that, as usual, restrooms garner the most complaints from occupants inside facilities — almost half of all grievances. This is consistent over the last eight years this survey has been conducted.

Although overall cleanliness in restrooms only resulted in weekly complaints to 15 percent of managers, an additional 20 percent of weekly gripes specified paper stock. Other culprits include odors (personnel, drain, and trash), excess/unemptied trash, and poor general appearance/unsightliness.

Soap stock, somewhat surprisingly, doesn't get nearly as much attention as the rest of the restroom. Patrons voice concerns only every few months, albeit an average of roughly 37 times over that timeframe. This reality could open the door to debate over handwashing frequency, or soap versus paper usage. But instead of speculating, managers should focus on the potential positives. Maybe the type of soap (foam versus gel) and/or quality dispenser helps control usage. Or maybe the staff opted for placement that reduces unsightly drips and messes. Either way, managers consider the lack of feedback in this area a win.

Outside the restroom, the most com-

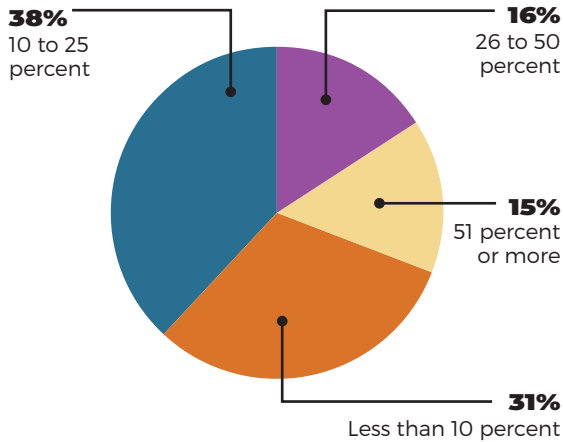
mon complaint managers field involves pests. Fifty-four percent of cleaning execs play referee as building occupants and staff debate over who is to blame for these unwelcome critters. Whether lured in by a forgotten PB&J in a teacher's drawer, welcomed through an open window meant to offer fresh air, or guilty of buzzing too loudly outside, these pests gobble up a lot of time. Almost a third of managers admit to spending two or more hours a day on complaints like this.

To keep complaints in check, department heads are prioritizing initiatives that should improve cleaning performance and boost customer service with building occupants. The most successful efforts include making changes and/or improvements in cleaning procedures and then ramping up training efforts. Half of all managers surveyed say changes in these two areas move the needle on reducing complaints.

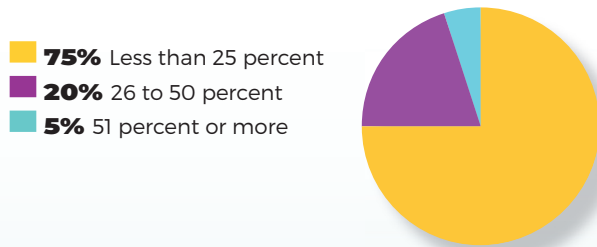
A shift toward day cleaning also works wonders at minimizing gripes from building occupants. Forty-nine percent of managers field fewer enquiries when occupants see cleaning being done and know the person behind the work. Pair this with an increase in communication and education directly to the building occupant and it's a recipe for success at reducing complaints.

Try as they may, facility cleaning managers will always have to be a listening ear. This *Facility Cleaning Decisions* Complaints Study outlines common legitimate and subjective complaints and how managers are responding. **FCD**

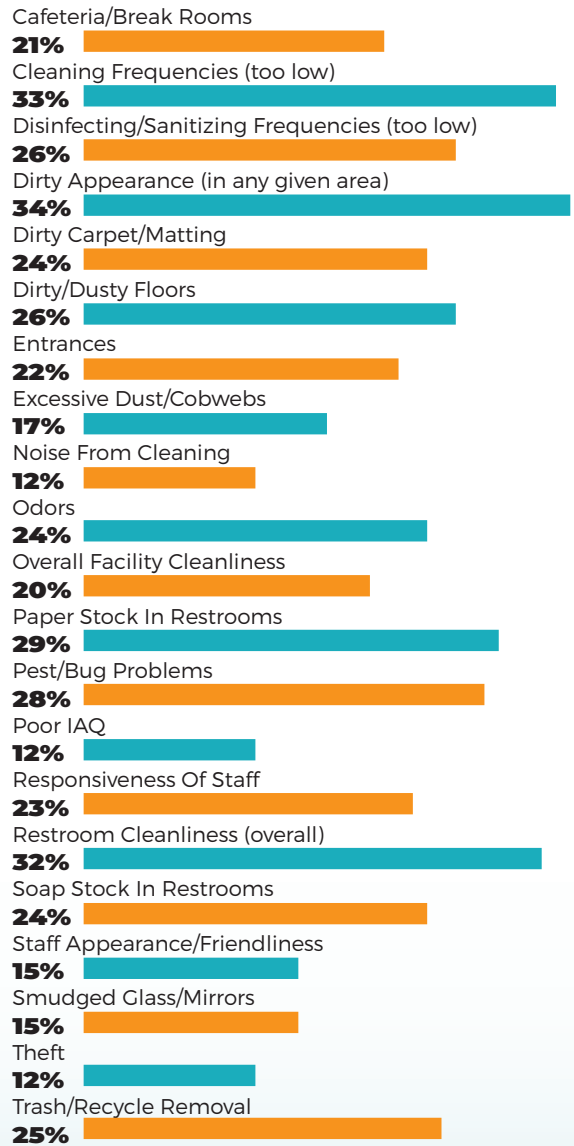
### WHAT PERCENTAGE OF COMPLAINTS OR REQUESTS WOULD YOU DESCRIBE AS PURELY SUBJECTIVE OR FRIVOLOUS?



### HOW MUCH DEPARTMENTAL TIME IS SPENT RESPONDING TO LEGITIMATE CLEANING COMPLAINTS OR REQUESTS EVERY MONTH?

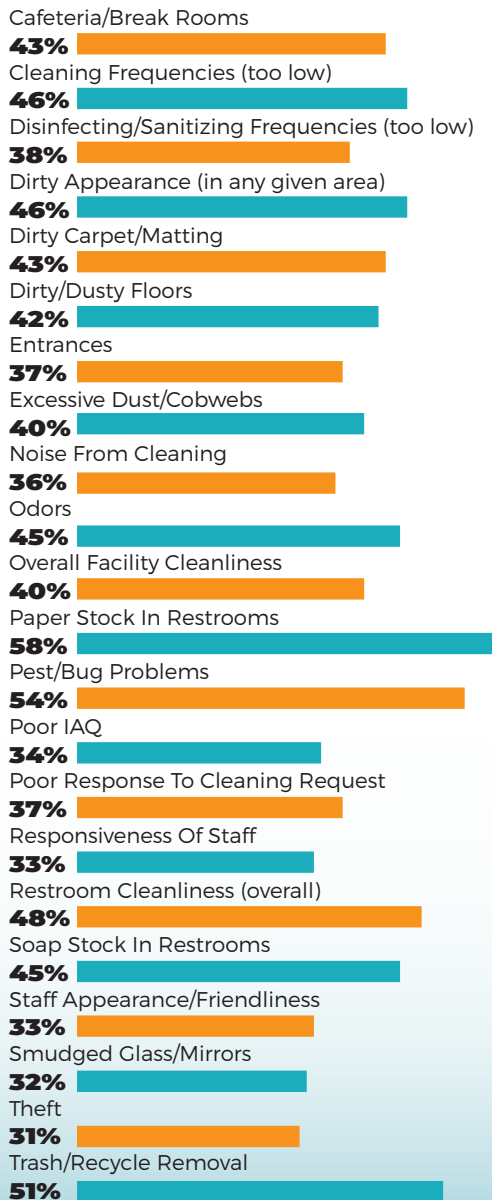


### HOW MANY CLEANING MANAGERS RECEIVE THESE COMPLAINTS AT LEAST EVERY TWO WEEKS?

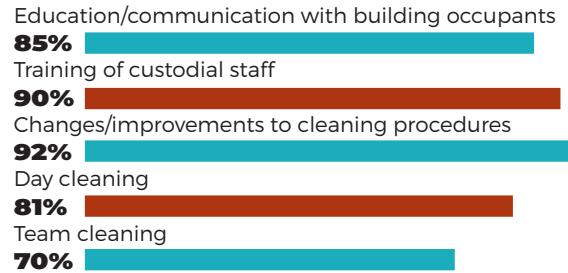




## WHAT IS THE SINGLE BIGGEST COMPLAINT CLEANING MANAGERS GET FROM BUILDING OCCUPANTS?



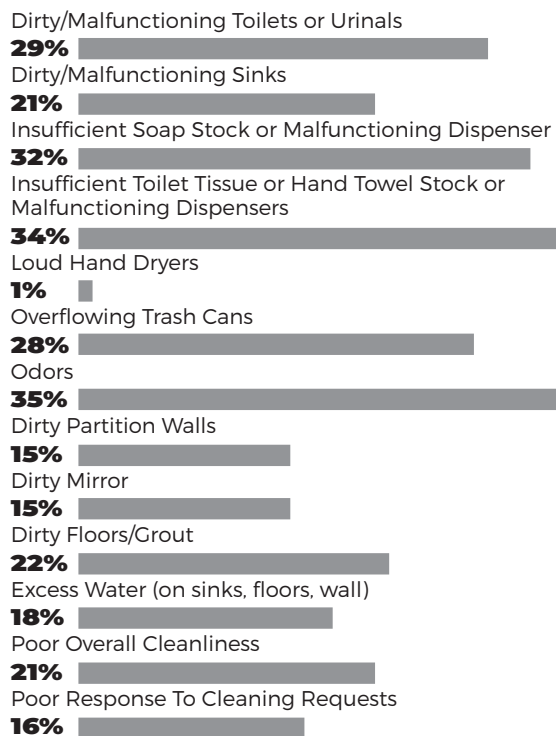
## MANAGERS HAVE BEEN VERY OR SOMEWHAT SUCCESSFUL AT MINIMIZING THE NUMBER OF SUBJECTIVE OR FRIVOLOUS COMPLAINTS/REQUESTS USING THESE METHODS.



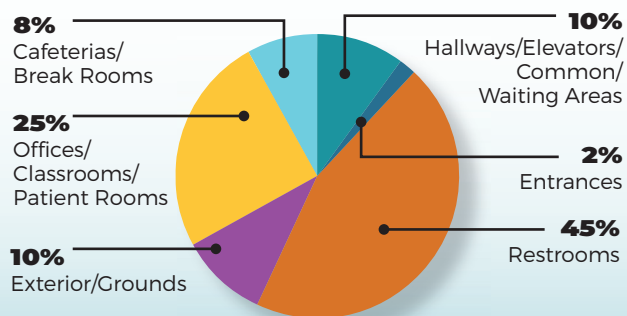
## WHAT FEEDBACK HAVE YOU RECEIVED AS A RESULT OF ADDITIONAL CLEANING INSTITUTED SINCE THE PANDEMIC?

- It shows that consistent procedures are followed.
- People think they know everything and they're experts on products to use, how to use them, where and when, and how to kill viruses.
- We've noticed less absences for staff and students, less trips to the nurse.
- We've started to get recognized for jobs well done.
- Are you ever going to disinfect things like before.
- The public that comes into the hospital, the residents, and patients say that the hospital is always clean and that the housekeeping staff does a good job.
- We typically receive many compliments on how clean our facilities are and on how responsive the custodial team is.

## RESTROOMS ARE OFTEN THE SOURCE OF COMPLAINTS. IN A TWO-WEEK SPAN, HOW MANY MANAGERS RECEIVE COMPLAINTS REGARDING THESE RESTROOM SERVICES?



## WHAT AREA OF THE FACILITY RECEIVES THE MOST CLEANING COMPLAINTS?

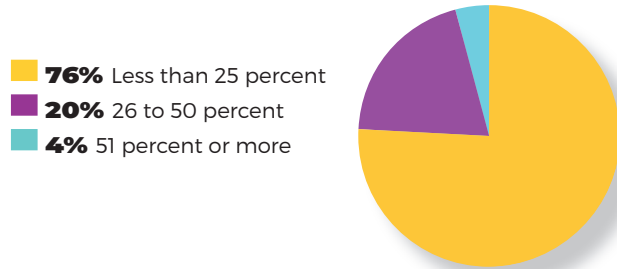


## CAN YOU SHARE A STORY OR PET PEEVE ABOUT SUBJECTIVE OR FRIVOLOUS REQUESTS/COMPLAINTS FROM OCCUPANTS?

- One woman would sneak her pet into the facility so she didn't have to board it during the day. Pets weren't allowed, so she couldn't walk them out to defecate. Instead, she'd dispose of it in her trash.
- The blinds don't block the light.
- That piece of paper has been on the floor for three days. Why hasn't the cleaner picked it up?
- One occupant locks their office door and has told us they don't want anyone inside, then complains that it hasn't been cleaned.
- The light shines too much light in the room.
- One occupant regularly comments about a situation that they've already corrected/resolved, because it wasn't a "big deal", but just wanted us to know for the future.
- Soaps and hand sanitizers expire from lack of physician use, but they want them replaced.
- Occupant throws paper holes from hole punch behind the office door. They'd then complain about cleanliness, even though they knew the vacuum schedule.
- Requests for refilling paper towels in one empty dispenser when there are two or three other functioning/stocked dispensers available in the same space.
- The toilet was clogged and overfilled in the middle of the day — customer complained that the custodian must not have cleaned the restroom or they would have noticed it.
- Customer didn't like the smell of the disinfectant that was used, so they asked us to stop disinfecting.
- We roped off a space to clean the floor. Immediately after the worker left, when the floor was still wet and signs were still up, we got complaints that the floor was flooded and needed cleaning.
- We have 10 acres of outdoor natural grassy and wooded space around our school campus, and people complain about the ants or bees.
- It smells too clean, so you must be spending too much time cleaning it.



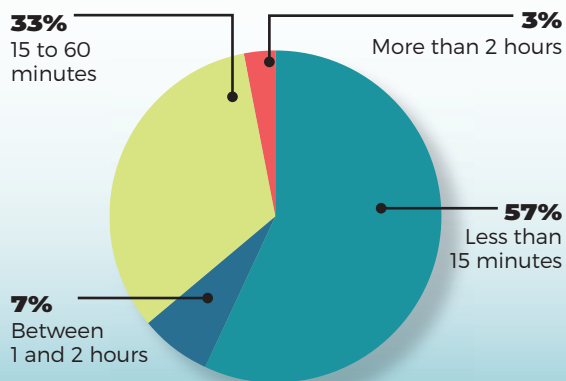
## HOW MUCH MANAGEMENT TIME IS SPENT RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS OR REQUESTS EVERY MONTH?



## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST OUTRAGEOUS COMPLAINTS YOUR DEPARTMENT HAS RECEIVED FROM A BUILDING OCCUPANT?

- After a full day of people showering, someone complained that there was hair in the shower drain.
- Staff left food in the trash over winter break and complained of odors upon their return.
- One resident complained about hearing voices coming from her toilet all night long.
- A ladybug is on my desk.
- Corridors aren't air conditioned and it's hot sometimes. They're open breezeways.
- Midnight emergency call that an occupants car wouldn't start. It was out of gas.
- Occupants asking cleaning staff to wash and put away dishes from common area.
- We received an IAQ complaint from a staff member regarding a smell. When investigated, it was her own body odor in a chair she was using.
- Why can't we stop the sun light from shining through the window?
- Why can't we have 10 towel dispensers in the restrooms so no one has to wait?
- Occupants prop doors open to get fresh air, and then complain about pests.
- I flushed my keys down the toilet, because you have no toilet paper.
- The restroom was occupied, so a bus driver had been using a stairwell to relieve himself.
- There are bees flying outside my window.

## HOW MUCH MANAGEMENT TIME IS SPENT RESPONDING TO FRIVOLOUS COMPLAINTS OR REQUESTS IN AN AVERAGE DAY?



## WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON COMPLAINT YOU RECEIVE FROM YOUR CLEANING STAFF?

- Too much work, you're too picky, why do we have to do that?
- Not enough staff or time to do a thorough job.
- Not being paid enough for what they do.
- The night crew didn't do all the things they were supposed to do.
- We don't have the right supplies to get the job done.
- Occupants are purposely making a mess.
- Occupants have little/no respect for custodians.
- Always blamed first for missing items.
- Occupants don't understand the specs or responsibilities of cleaners, and expectations are often unrealistic.
- Cleaning is a hard job.

## WHAT IS THE MOST OUTRAGEOUS COMPLAINT YOU HAVE RECEIVED FROM SOMEONE ON YOUR CLEANING STAFF?

- A request to telework.
- There's a ghost in the building so I couldn't finish cleaning.
- There are people sleeping/living in the restrooms.
- Teachers shouldn't have anything in their rooms except for tables and chairs, so we can clean easier.
- That the worker didn't like to be around germs or anything dirty.
- Cleaning carpets is pointless, so we should just stop doing it.
- A temp worker was hired for 20 hours a week, but we were asking too much of them.
- One of the professors taped about a dozen large flies that he had killed to his office windows.
- They can't take the trash to the dumpster because it was raining.
- Cleaning every other day should be good enough.

## HOW DO CLEANING MANAGERS REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF INSTANCES OR TIME SPENT RESPONDING TO SUBJECTIVE COMPLAINTS?

- Consistent (daily/weekly/monthly) building walk-throughs and inspections
- Maintaining comprehensive checklists and keeping staff accountable
- Focus on staff retention — turnover adds to the problem
- Re-evaluate cleaning frequencies and maintaining product inventory
- Maintaining strong relationships with building occupants and open communication regarding cleaning expectations
- Consistent and comprehensive training can reduce complaints substantially
- Implemented different products and equipment that is more straightforward

### **Methodology**

This research report provides insights into how often facility cleaning managers receive cleaning complaints and specific requests as they transition to a post-pandemic society.

### **Sample**

The survey audience was drawn from subscribers to *Facility Cleaning Decisions* magazine (facility cleaning managers in nonresidential buildings). The sample consisted of the following organizations: Educational, Government, Commercial Office, Medical/Healthcare, industrial, retail, and hospitality.

### **Survey**

The survey was sent out via e-mail to 23,927 subscribers on July 10, 2024. Follow-up survey reminders were e-mailed to non-respondents on July 16, July 18, July 23 and July 26th, 2024. A total of 1,974 chose to opt out.

### **Response**

The survey closed for responses on August 4, 2024. A total of 137 questionnaires were returned by the deadline.

### **Statistical confidence**

The overall estimated margin of error for this study is  $\pm .63$  percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

