

Cleaning Up Your Act

Do your patrons blow dust off books as they remove them from shelves? Does your staff sneeze a lot? At the end of the day, does your white garment resemble the "before" segment of a detergent commercial? If yes, it's time to clean up your act. By maintaining a clean environment, you accomplish three things: 1) You help preserve the materials; 2) you have more pleasant working conditions; and 3) you demonstrate to your patrons that you care about your collections.

Vacuum cleaners with brush attachments are obvious choices, but they are noisy and they can suck up loose spines and loose fragments of text. Wrap and tape a piece of nylon stocking over the brush to prevent accidentally sucking up things besides dust. If you have no machine or cannot stand the din, then One-Wipe™ or Dust Bunny™ dust cloths may be used. In many cases, using a vacuum followed by dust cloths is better than using only one method.

Always start on the top shelves so that any disturbed dust falls onto the dirty books beneath. With a vacuum you can do the tops of the all volumes on a shelf, clean the fore edges as you remove the books, then do the shelf. If you are using only dust cloths, it is a bit more complicated. Begin at one end of a row and remove a tome, holding it firmly around the spine with one hand to prevent dust from falling among the leaves. Of course, once you remove a few volumes, the others will fall over, so you need to prop them up with a sturdy bookend or a padded brick.

After you have removed a volume, turn it so the spine is uppermost and gently wipe the head with the cloth, moving from the spine towards the fore edge. Then do the fore edge and finish with a wipe over the entire volume. Place the cleaned volume on a book truck or shelf away from the action and repeat the procedure for the remaining items on the shelf. After the shelf is empty, dust it well and then replace the tomes.

Continue in a like manner until the top two or three shelves of an entire stack are clean. If you go about this like a person stomping snakes, you may only get the top shelf done before you start blowing dust on items across the aisle, so work accordingly. Be sure to alternate stacks so that dust from the top of one range does not fall onto clean items on the bottom of the unit across the way. Remember to clean the floor gently every once in a while, so you don't kick up dust with your feet.

Simple? Yes. Boring? Absolutely. Working with a partner makes the process go more quickly, both physically and psychologically. The job does require some care, but not the concentration of a brain surgeon, so talking with someone or listening to the radio will help alleviate the boredom.