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Stronger Than Dirt? Floor-Cleaning Machines Key HA Maintenance Tool I News of the Week

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FALL CLEANING: New York City Housing Authority Caretakers at Brooklyn's Ingersoll Houses learned how to use new floor-cleaning machines, which the agency hopes will cut cleaning times in half. The training is mandatory for its 3,197 janitorial staff.

"We want to become a more efficient landlord. That's why we're really excited about this plan," said Brian Clarke, Senior Vice President for Operations at the New York City Housing Authority, regarding staff training in how to use new floor-cleaning

machines that the agency hopes will speed the process.

Mr. Clarke said that the idea to equip staff with professional machines came up about a year ago, because Housing Caretakers are understaffed, and cleaning the floors often takes up more than half of the day. He said that the project is another piece of NextGeneration NYCHA, which was implemented two years ago with a goal of reducing the agency's capital needs by \$4.6 billion.

'Like Increasing Staff'

"One of our biggest challenges is years and years of disinvestment in public housing," he said. "Investing in these machines is almost like increasing staff."

The agency anticipates that the machines will save caretakers three-to-four hours on cleaning floors each day. "Instead of spending the entire day mopping, they can do other things," such as checking the grounds, Mr. Clarke said.

The first training session took place this month at the Ingersoll Houses in Brooklyn, where the caretakers spent half a day learning about floor-cleaning science and the second half learning how to operate the machines.

"They got really excited once it was hands-on," Mr. Clarke said.

Gregory Floyd, President of Teamsters Local 237, which represents about 8,000 NYCHA employees, said that understaffing has been a major problem over the past 10 to 15 years, noting there used to be 5,000 Caretakers.

"I applaud the agency for trying to alleviate our workers, but I'm

going to reserve my judgment until I see how the machines work,” he said.

Will Train 3,200

The training is mandatory for the 3,197 janitorial staff employed by NYCHA, including Caretakers, Supervisors of Caretakers, Assistant Property Maintenance Supervisors and Property Maintenance Supervisors.

So far, NYCHA has purchased a few hundred floor-cleaning machines from reputable brands such as Tennant, and will eventually buy 1,100 of them. The project was given a \$5-million budget, more than the agency actually spent, Mr. Clarke said.

The machines are battery-operated and self-driving, and work by releasing clean water, then picking up the dirty water and drying the floor, he said. Because NYCHA’s developments vary greatly—some are nearly 30 stories high, while others are just four, and some such as Fort Washington have wide hallways—the agency purchased six different kinds of machines to meet the need of each location.

Training will be conducted in one borough at a time—the first

occurred in Brooklyn, then moving to Staten Island, Queens, The Bronx and Manhattan. Each of the city's 326 housing developments will receive their floor-cleaning machines within two weeks of the training. The machines' manufacturers will provide additional training at each development.

Staff should be fully trained by the end of the year, an agency spokesperson said.

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