

HOW SAFE IS DRYCLEANING? (36)

I was invited to be a panelist on a round table session consisting of leading fashion designers and high quality drycleaners. Some of the fashion designers had the notion that drycleaning shortens the life of a garment. They were therefore recommending to their clients to limit drycleaning the garments. This misconception has originated from the fact there is confusion over what washing does to a garment and what drycleaning does. Washing or laundering fabrics shortens the life of a fabric. When water contacts a fiber it is absorbed causing the fiber to swell. On some fabrics such as rayon the tensile strength of the fiber is weakened. The chemicals and bleaches used weakens fabrics causing a shorter life expectancy. A white shirt for example may withstand only 100 washings.

Drycleaning is a different process entirely from washing. The drycleaning solvent and detergents used do not have a chemical reaction on the fiber. The fiber on contact with drycleaning solvents does not swell or weaken. Tests taken on fabrics subjected to drycleaning show no loss of tensile strength. It is true that some people had problems when their garments were drycleaned. This can be attributed to weakness in the fabric, manufacturing defects or mishandling by the drycleaner.

STAINING AND SOIL

Trying to limit cleaning garments can be damaging to the fabric. Chloride salts found in perspiration, deodorants, foods and beverage not only cause fabrics to discolor but can also cause it to deteriorate. Soil that stays in clothes can act as an abrasive and cause fabrics to weaken. Germs and bacteria are other detrimental factors affecting fabrics that are not cleaned on a regular basis.

MUSEUMS

I have dealt with many museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney and Brooklyn Museum. I am currently a cleaning consultant to the Elliott Museum in Stuart. The delicate antique fabrics displayed by museums frequently undergo drycleaning to remove damaging staining and soil. When the Elliott Museum displayed their wedding gown exhibit I had arranged for Quality Cleaners in Stuart, Florida to clean some of their gowns. Many delicate fabrics can withstand the drycleaning process but not washing.