

A solid green horizontal bar.

HOW LIMESCALE IMPACTS ON INFECTION CONTROL



Bedpan washers are a tried and tested infection control solution. Specially designed to disinfect reusable bedpans and utensils, they protect clinicians and patients by eliminating the need to wash by hand.

Aside from being exceedingly unpleasant for the clinician, washing bedpans by hand only removes the visible – the infectious material – leaving behind the harmful microbes which get spread across the surface of the pan turning it into the perfect vector for infection.

Bedpan washers not only take away the sheer unpleasantness involved with washing bedpans by hand but they continuously heat the water to 80 degrees Celsius during the cleaning cycle, fully disinfecting the bedpan or utensil.

How this works

A bedpan washer shares certain commonalities with other appliances that heat water including a temperature control unit and heating filaments.

Once activated the bedpan washer's internal systems will ensure that the water is heated to and held at 80 degrees Celsius throughout the cleaning cycle which will kill 99.9% of known bacteria.

This works much like a washing machine, with filaments heating the water as it flows through the pipes then out of the cleaning nozzles.

However, because it works like a washing machine it can also experience some of the same problems...

Limescale

Much like a well-used washing machine, the heating filaments can become caked in Limescale. Limescale is made up of calcium carbonate, the components of which – calcium and magnesium – are already present in the water.

Limescale will naturally – and quickly – form on any surface the water comes into contact with and bonds particularly well to metals.

As the metal filaments get coated with Limescale it takes longer and longer for the filaments to be brought up to the required temperature.

This takes more energy and puts more strain on other components such as the temperature control unit. This simple yet crucial component regulates heat. It knows how long it takes for the filament to heat up to that all-important 80 degrees and how long the filaments need to keep drawing power for in relation to the cleaning cycle.

The more Limescale on the filaments the longer the cycle takes, which makes the machine less and less efficient – wasting energy and time. Long term it can affect the performance of the machine to the point where the bedpans and utensils aren't being properly disinfected.

If the bedpan washer doesn't get serviced regularly the Limescale can also take root on other components such as the temperature control unit, fouling its sensors and causing a malfunction.

This can result in the bedpan washer completing cleaning cycles without the water being heated to a high enough temperature, at which point you're putting your patients and clinicians in the same kind of danger as if the bedpan had been washed by hand.



What can be done?

There are certain signs to be mindful of when operating a bedpan washer. The first is cleaning cycles taking longer than normal.

As Limescale builds up on key components it will take longer and longer for the water to get up to the desired temperature so the wash cycles themselves will take longer too. If your bedpan washer seems to be running slow this could well be why.

Similarly if the bedpans aren't coming out of the machine hot to the touch this is a sign that the water isn't being heated to the correct temperature. This is a major health risk as a bedpan hasn't been disinfected.

A simple fix is the use of a Limescale inhibitor such as DDC Dolphin's Scalematic cartridge, which removes the calcium and magnesium found in hard water areas. This won't eliminate Limescale completely but it will significantly reduce the rate of build-up and extend the life of the machine.

Coupled with regular servicing the components can be maintained or replaced as needed to ensure the performance of the machine isn't compromised and patients aren't put at risk.

To learn more about how we can support your existing infection control solution contact us today to speak to one of our experts.

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