



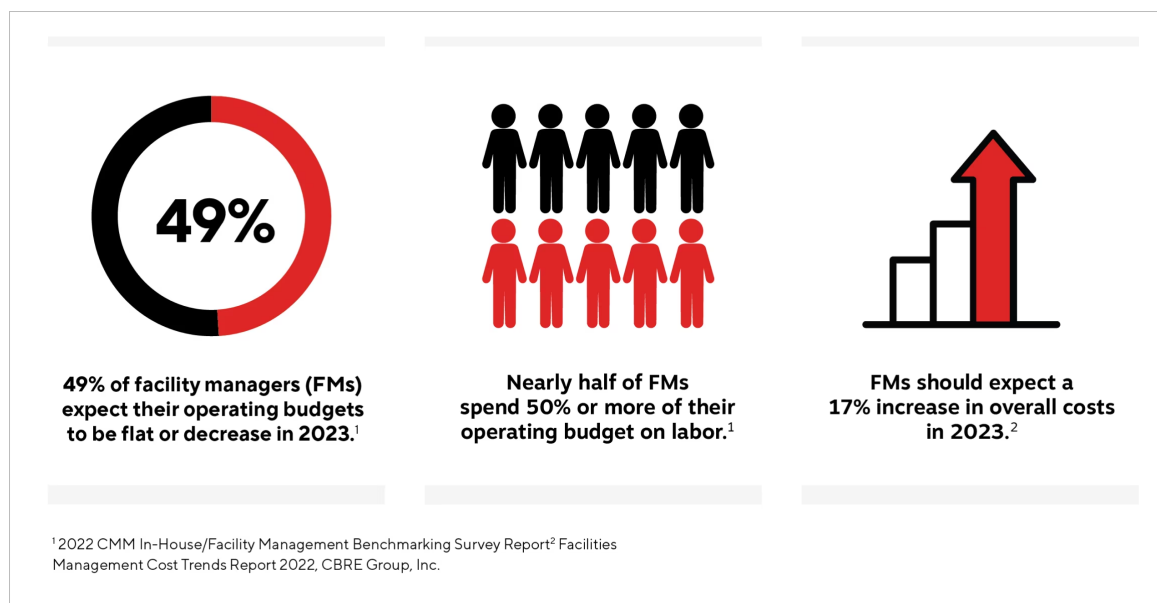
Five Ways Facility Managers Can Reduce Labor Costs and Product Waste

Jeffrey Beland
Senior Facilities Marketing Manager

The biggest line-item expense in a facility manager's operating budget is labor. People cost money. A lot of it.

So, how do you reduce labor costs?

That's a loaded question. The expected answer would be, "Cut salaries." However, this option isn't viable, given that **seven out of 10 facility managers (FMs) reported a cleaning-staff turnover rate at 30% last year.**



Attracting and retaining your cleaning and maintenance staff is difficult enough when there are plenty of workers to choose from. But with turnover rates as high as the data reveals, paying your staff less money isn't a recipe for your success.

The key to reducing your labor costs is to reduce your labor time. (Meaning, you minimize the amount of time it takes for one person to complete a single cleaning task.)

What if there were a way to do exactly that?

Or better yet, how about five ways to reduce labor time? Many smart and savvy FMs have found success when implementing one or more of these practices into their operations:

#1. Reduce Product Waste.

#2. Use the Proper Cleaning Products.

#3. Standardize and Simplify Your Cleaning Processes.

#4. Prioritize Your Cleaning Staff's Safety.

#5. Leverage Vendor Expertise.

Let's look closer at each one.

#1. Reduce Product Waste

Limiting waste on cleaning and maintenance products isn't a novel tactic for reducing costs. However, most facility managers have historically regarded product waste on a purely macro level. Water conservation comes to mind. Recycling. Purchasing cleaning products in bulk.

The more focused approach to reducing product waste as a cost-saving measure requires exactly that: focus. Instead of generally asking, "How do I reduce product waste?", many facility managers take their product list and ask, "How do I reduce waste on every product I purchase?"

It's this level of focus that makes the difference.

Paper Towels

Let's focus on a commodity product used every day, like restroom towels. According to research conducted by the Georgia-Pacific Professional division, [automated towel dispensers](#) can reduce paper consumption by up to 50%.

They also require less maintenance than traditional options. When a roll runs out in an automated system, it can be easily replaced without any disruption or mess. This isn't always possible with manual systems, which often require staff to manually refill them with fresh rolls periodically throughout the day. This means lower operational costs for facility managers and more money saved overall.

[Shop Paper Towels](#)

[Shop Automated Paper Towel Dispensers](#)



Automated towel dispensers can reduce paper consumption by **up to 50%**.

Soap and Sanitizers

What about reducing waste with [restroom soap and sanitizers](#)? Consider the savings of smart soap dispensers, which can reduce hand-washing costs by up to 80%, while also reducing waste due to their precise dosing capabilities.

Smart soap dispensers also come equipped with features such as auto-refill, wireless monitoring, and leak detection technology, which help cut down on labor costs associated with manual maintenance tasks. Also, many vendors offer refill subscription services which are designed for convenience and cost savings for facility managers purchasing in bulk quantities.

[Shop Soap & Sanitizer Dispensers](#)

[Shop Automated Soap & Sanitizer Dispensers](#)





A large university was spending approximately **\$1,000 per month** on *traditional liquid soaps* in its restrooms. After installing *100 smart soap dispensers*, their monthly expenditure dropped to **\$200 per month**.



Dilution Control Systems

Facility managers are even finding ways to reduce product waste and labor costs during the cleaning prep phase with dilution control systems. Thanks to its precise measurements and near-perfect accuracy rates, a [dilution control system](#) can reduce labor time spent on mixing and measuring chemicals by up to 30% compared to traditional methods.

With increased speed comes increased productivity. Facility managers who've adopted this approach find that their cleaning staff can accomplish more tasks in less time than ever before due to improved accuracy from these systems.

[Shop Dilution Control Systems](#)

#2. Use the Proper Cleaning Products

If reducing labor costs is a true objective, then focusing your operation's efforts on using the proper products for the cleaning task at hand must become a priority. That's because the right cleaning products and tools are usually the ones that clean most effectively and fastest.

Backpack Vacuums

The 21st century upgrade to traditional commercial vacuums, [backpack vacuums](#) provide more freedom of motion and eliminates the issue of the power cord getting in the way of the vacuum or your feet. Being more mobile makes dusting, cleaning vents and blinds, and vacuuming stairs a breeze. This improvement in mobility makes cleaning more efficient and allows the user to clean up to four times faster than an upright vacuum.

Over time, the ability to vacuum faster will help you reduce labor costs. With an average janitor's wage of \$13 per hour, you could save \$85,800 per year for every 100,000 square feet your staff cleans. Pardon the pun, but that doesn't suck.

[Shop Backpack Vacuums](#)



Garbage Liners

Choosing the right [can liner](#) for the receptacle can save you money and reduce plastic consumption. Identify the type and weight of the content, the transport conditions and size of the receptacle. Once that information is determined, the correct type, size and thickness of liner can be chosen.

[High-density bags](#) are used for paper and non-rough objects under moderate transport conditions. These bags are very strong and handle higher load capacities than low-density bags, but they tear easier once punctured.

[Low-density bags](#) are used for rough or sharp objects under tough transport conditions. These bags are very strong and are more resistant to tearing, but they handle lower load capacities than high-density bags.

[Shop all garbage liners](#)

Automated Tools

An obvious example is [automated floor-care solutions](#) like [scrubbers](#), [sweepers](#) and [vacuums](#). They save substantially on labor costs by reducing both the time required for floor care as well as eliminating the need for manual labor. Robotic scrubbers can clean large areas in a fraction of the time it would take a human cleaner - without sacrificing quality or efficiency.

A study conducted by Facilities Management Magazine found that when facilities switched from traditional manual cleaning methods to automated floor-care solutions, such as robotic scrubbers, their labor costs were reduced by up to 30%. And this isn't an isolated case; similar results have been seen across multiple industries including healthcare, education and more.



Janitor
5,000 square feet

60 MINUTES



Automatic Scrubber
5,000 square feet

12 MINUTES

Microfiber Cleaning

One of the key paradigm shifts in cleaning practices has been the transition from cotton cloths and string mops to [microfiber textiles](#). Several seminal studies in the early to mid-2000s demonstrated that not only were microfiber products more

Microfiber mops weigh approximately five pounds less than conventional wet loop mops, making them much easier to use. And in healthcare settings, the microfiber mop head is changed

effective in removing microbes, dust, and other debris from surfaces, they were also more user friendly and cost effective.

One study in particular was published in the American Journal of Infection Control in 2007. Its results demonstrated that, without the use of a chemical disinfectant, microfiber mops achieved superior microbial removal (95%) compared to cotton string mops (68%)³.

A multi-site long-term care facility system documented a 129% increase in cleaning efficiency after implementing microfiber cloths and mops to improve efficiency and standards.

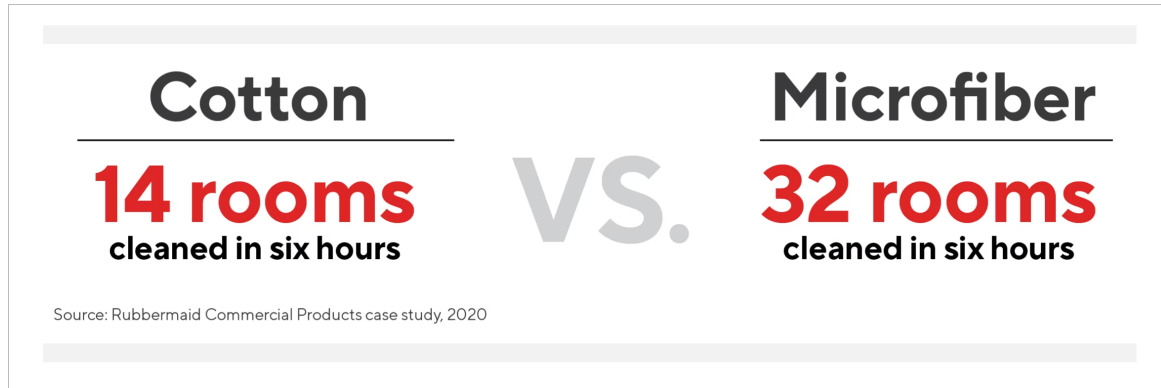
[Shop Microfiber Cloths](#)

after every room is mopped, benefiting the custodial staff in two ways:

[Shop Microfiber Mops](#)

1. The effort of wringing a conventional mop is eliminated.
2. As long as the used mop head is not put back in the cleaning solution, the custodian does not have to change the solution between rooms.

The latter feature is particularly attractive, as a full bucket of cleaning solution can weigh 30 pounds or more and must be lifted an average of seven times a day. Both characteristics significantly reduced labor costs.



#3. Standardize and Simplify Your Cleaning Processes

Long before facility management was invented, statesman and inventor Benjamin Franklin coined the phrase “time is money”. Franklin was far ahead of the curve with this notion because it still proves true today. And as all smart facility managers can attest, decreasing the amount of time your staff spends on each task is the key to reducing labor costs.

Put another way, if reducing labor costs is why facility managers “do more with less”, then standardizing your facility’s cleaning processes is a big part of how to do it.

A cursory online search reveals a laundry list of actions to include when standardizing cleaning processes. The most common include:

- Reviews of current cleaning protocols to identify improvements
- Frequent and thorough training to help cleaning staff complete daily tasks faster
- Clear assignments with well-defined daily, weekly and project tasks

Yet, smart and savvy facility managers are now leveraging an often-overlooked element that greatly reduces cleaning time: **the products they purchase and use for cleaning.**

Ready-to-Dispense (RTD) Chemicals

These pre-measured doses of liquid cleaning agents ensure that the correct amount of detergent or sanitizer is used every time, which helps maintain the consistency of your cleaning process. Using [RTD chemicals](#) also eliminates the need for manual dosing, which reduces both labor costs and waste from the overuse or underuse of chemical products. And since these cleaning products are designed for single use only, there’s no need to worry about contamination from previous uses.

RTD chemicals come in a variety of sizes, so you can choose the right dose for each job. This gives your cleaning staff better control over how much product is used each time - another cost saver.

Additionally, RTD chemicals come with color coding, so you know exactly what product is being used and when; this makes it easier to quickly identify products for reorder and streamlines training new staff on proper usage protocols.

[Shop \(RTD\) Chemicals](#)

Chemical Portion Packs

Another requisite to a standardized cleaning process is the chemical portion pack. These premeasured packages of cleaning chemicals are designed for single-use applications (think dishwasher detergent pods but on a commercial/industrial level). Available in many shapes and sizes, each pack only contains what’s needed for one use - which means there’s no need to measure out chemicals or worry about accidental spills or overuse.

Chemical portion packs contain premeasured amounts of product. Different employees can’t use different amounts of product, so every application is consistent. This decreases employee training time and ensures that your workplace meets safety regulations while staying efficient and cost effective.

Pre-Treated Wipes

[Pre-treated wipes](#) are cloths or papers that come pre-moistened with a disinfectant solution. They are designed to make it easier for users to quickly clean and disinfect surfaces without having to mix, measure, or prepare any chemicals themselves. This means that once the wipe is pulled out of its package, it is ready to be used right away. Time. Saved.

Since the same concentration of disinfectant is used each time, you can be sure that all surfaces will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected every time a wipe is used. This also eliminates any confusion about what type of cleaner or disinfectant should be used on certain surfaces, as it removes the need for multiple types of cleaning products in one facility.

Pre-treated wipes also add an element of versatility to your cleaning procedures; they're ideal for quick touch-ups or deep cleanings.

[Shop Pre-Treated Wipes](#)



Training in Less Time

It should be noted another huge time and cost saver associated with simplifying your cleaning processes: cleaning staff training time. Consider the high turnover rate of cleaning staff coupled with the hours spent getting new employees acclimated to a new role. A simplified cleaning process reduces training time AND ensures cleaning across locations for multi-site businesses.

#4. Prioritize Your Cleaning Staff's Safety

Most FMs recognize the obvious value in providing a safe work environment for their cleaning and maintenance staff. When employees feel safe at work, they're more likely to be productive and motivated. This in turn leads to higher employee satisfaction rates, which can result in improved morale and employee retention.

However, what most facility managers do NOT realize is that focusing on staff safety can significantly reduce labor costs. Put simply, safety saves money.

Understanding the truth of this statement (and more importantly, acting on it) requires a closer look at some labor statistics coupled with a bit of simple math.



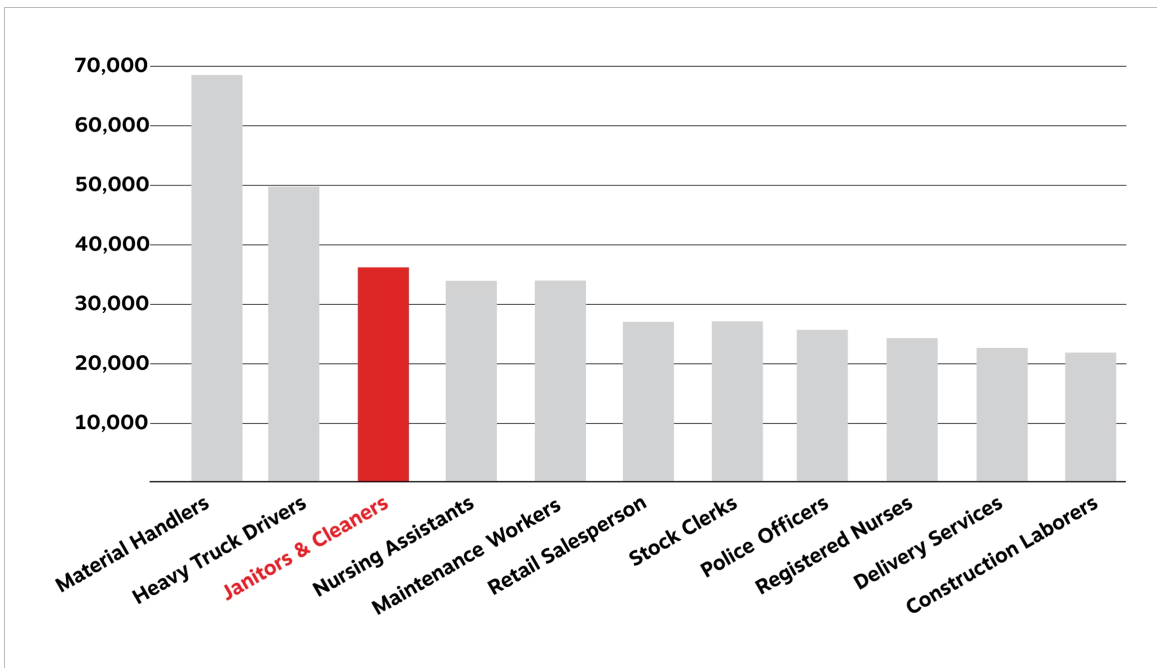
Injury Rates Matter

Janitors and cleaners rank third in the number of days away from work due to nonfatal workplace injuries.⁴ Only material handlers and heavy-truck drivers take off more days due to injury. However, that one factoid doesn't even begin to tell the full story. Eliminating the top two occupations from consideration reveals that janitors and cleaners missed work due to injuries at nearly **twice the rate of all other occupations.**

Facility managers have always known that keeping things clean is a messy business. The stats now appear to prove it.

And because their injuries occurred during the daily performance of their jobs, these janitors and cleaners qualified for and received **workers' compensation benefits.** Every facility manager currently reading this article is aware of their respective company's legal requirement to pay workers' compensation insurance premiums.

But many companies pay thousands of dollars more in premiums than they have to.



A Quick Workers-Comp Primer

Workers' compensation insurance covers the cost of medical care, rehabilitation, and lost wages for workers if they suffer a work-related illness or injury. The employee gives up the right to sue the employer for injuries caused by the employer's negligence. In return, the employee receives workers compensation benefits regardless of who or what caused the accident.

While the specifics vary by state, the formula used to determine a company's workers' comp insurance premium is essentially the same:

THE FORMULA

$$\text{Annual Insurance Premium} = \frac{\text{Total Payroll}}{\$100} \times \text{NCCI Industry Class Code} \times \text{Experience Modifier (EMOD)}$$

The last variable in this formula, the experience modifier (EMOD), is the key to reducing labor costs because it's the only variable that facility managers can influence. Let's repeat that statement for dramatic purposes:

You have the power to raise or lower the experience modifier (EMOD).

The EMOD is a unique multiplier based on two factors: The number of claims made by your employees over the last three years. The average number of claims for similar companies in your state

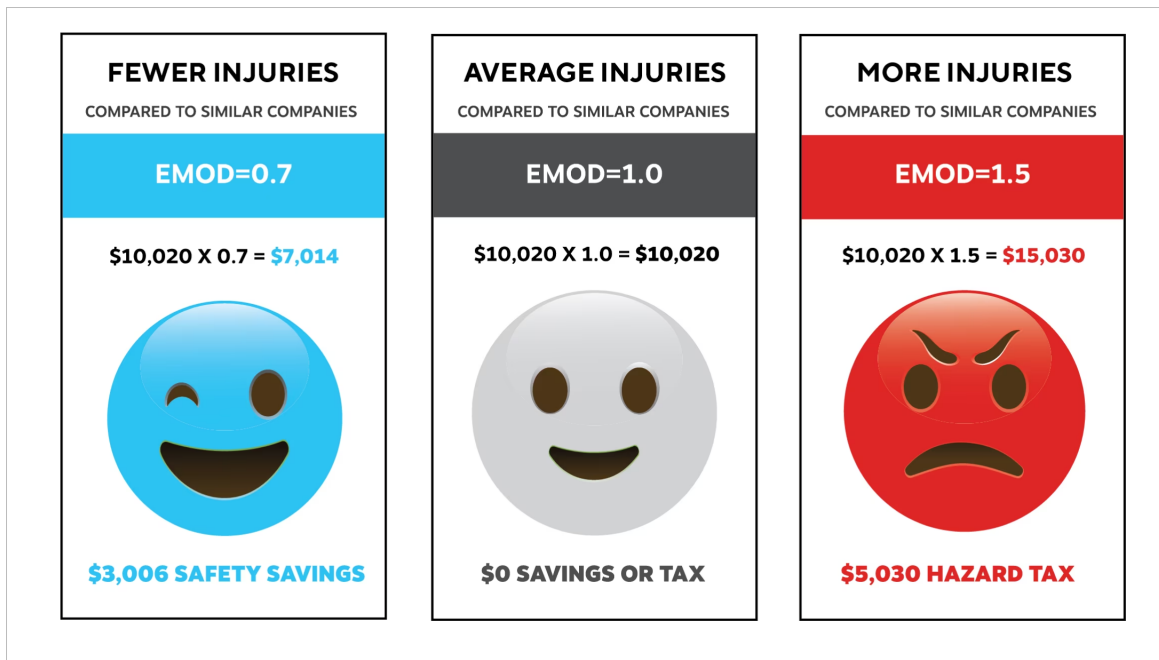
Historically, most EMODs fall between 0.7 and 1.5. EMODs less than 1 mean you've probably had fewer work-related injuries than comparable companies in your state. EMODs higher than 1 mean your employees most likely filed more claims. You can find your company's current EMOD by reviewing its most recent Workers' Compensation Experience Rating.

WORKERS COMPENSATION EXPERIENCE RATING									
Risk Name: ABC Company		Production Date: 04/09/2020				Risk ID: 123456789			
Rating Effective Date: 07/24/2020		State: MISSOURI							
State	Wt	Exp Excess Losses	Expected Losses	Exp Prim Losses	Act Exc Losses	Ballast	Act Inc Losses	Act Prim Losses	
MO	07	21,234	28,714	7,480	126,112	34,875	143,612	17,500	
(A) (B) (C) Exp Excess Losses (D) (E) (F) Act Exc Losses (G) Ballast (H) Act Inc Losses (I) Act Prim Losses		21,234	28,714	7,480	126,112	34,875	143,612	17,500	
Primary Losses		Stabilizing Value		Ratable Excess		Totals			
(B)	17,500	C * (1 - A) + G	54,623	(A) * (F)	8,828	(J)	80,951		
(E)	7,480	C * (1 - A) + G	54,623	(A) * (C)	1,486	(K)	63,589		
ARAP		FLARAP		SARAP		MAARAP		Exp Mod	
Factors		1.25						1.27	
THE ARAP FACTOR SHOWN IS CAPPED AT THE APPROVED MAXIMUM ARAP SURCHARGE FOR THIS STATE.									
Carrier: 33559-001		Policy: WCS-20275192		Eff-Date: 07-24-2019		Exp-Date: 07-24-2020			

Most EMOD's fall between 0.7 and 1.5
In this example, the EMOD of 1.27 means ABC Company is paying a 27% 'hazard tax'.

Your company's EMOD is determined by reviewing the total number of claims your employees made in the last three years. One year with few or zero claims can help lower that number. Three consecutive good years with few or no claims can entirely replace your old EMOD.

Also, the frequency of incidents each year has a far greater impact on the EMOD than the severity of injuries. Insurance providers look for patterns of risk, not one-off catastrophes. Therefore, small yet frequent claims are weighted more heavily than large, isolated claims.



Taking Safety by the Hand

Obtaining a lower EMOD score requires minimizing or eliminating worker injuries. So, let's begin there - specifically with the three tasks performed by janitors and cleaning staff that are most frequently associated with workers' compensation claims⁵.

1. Wet mopping
2. Waste collection and transport
3. Pushing heavy carts

Replace String Mops with Microfiber Flat Mops.

Traditional string mops weigh more than eight pounds during use. The constant mop wringing compounds strain on the cleaner's back and shoulders. Traditional mops tend to oversaturate the floor surfaces, which requires longer drying times and increases the risk of slipping injuries.

Flat mops that utilize microfiber pads weigh about three pounds during use. Their light weight alleviates the torque on the cleaner's back and shoulders, as well as reduces the strain when wringing.

Bonus perk: Microfiber flat mops can cover about 1,000 square feet more per hour than string mops.

[Shop Microfiber Flat Mops](#)

Replace Fixed-Height Utility Carts with Ergonomic Models.

Cleaning and maintenance utility carts with fixed handles force taller or shorter users into poor alignment. Bending up or down to reach handles causes spinal flexion and adds pressure on spinal discs. The weight of the cart and its contents compounds the strain on the cleaner. Turning a loaded fixed-handle cart is unwieldy and can increase the risk of falls.

Ergonomic carts with adjustable handles generally include a variety of positions to accommodate a wide range of user heights without compromising body position.

[Shop Adjustable Utility Carts](#)



For seven years, I moved 300 pounds around on two wheels. And I did seven of those bins a night. So, my body paid for that."

Excerpt from janitor interviews

#5. Leverage Vendor Expertise



It's a familiar cycle: When facing ongoing pressure to reduce operating costs, many companies trim their facility management budgets. Yet, once the financial outlook rebounds, spending levels often remain low. This pattern forces facility managers to consider outsourcing as a cost-saving measure. Soft services, like cleaning and building sanitation, are particularly ripe targets.

Weighing the pros and cons of outsourcing these services is not the purpose of this section. However, smart and savvy facility managers are looking outside their organizations for assistance with reducing labor costs. They're leveraging the decades of experience available to them in the form of their vendors and suppliers.

Instead of outsourcing the services, they outsource the expertise.

Utilizing Vendor Expertise

Your vendors and suppliers have years of experience in their respective fields and can often provide valuable guidance on how to reduce labor costs within your organization. They may also provide helpful insights into what their other customers are doing to reduce their labor costs.

The nature of facility management requires most FMs to be generalists. Yet, vendors in the cleaning products industry are often specialists, meaning their business models are focused on one particular segment of cleaning. They are well-versed on the problems, solutions, hazards, and joys of their respective areas of expertise. Reviewing the list below will most likely conjure a brand name you recognize (or even a current or prospective vendor) that specializes in that segment:

- Floor-care specialists
- Soap and sanitizer specialists
- Paper specialists
- Refuse storage and collection specialists

And do not discount the value of the research and development (R&D) most cleaning product companies possess. Part of their R&D department's very existence is to help facility managers succeed. It's how they win new customers and retain existing ones.



Inviting Outside Vendors In

One of the most effective ways to leverage your vendors' expertise is to bring them into the fold of your operation. Like a skilled auto mechanic, your vendors will require a thorough look under the hood, so to speak, to identify cost-saving opportunities and recommend solutions.

- Give them access to your daily operations.
- Schedule an on-site assessment with them.
- Have them interview your cleaning staff.
- Invite them to inspect what you clean, where you clean and how you clean.

Some facility managers may be a bit protective of their turf. They might feel that bringing in outsiders is too invasive of a procedure. But remember, doctors can't accurately diagnose a patient's health until they've performed a complete examination.

So, consider it a wellness visit to manage your labor cost malady. Your operating budget will be healthier in the long run.

Forming Strategic Partnerships

Quality vendors and suppliers aren't looking for the quick sale; they seek long-lasting customer relationships. Their company profits and bonuses are predicated on returning customers and repeat business. As such, few quality vendors would ever miss out on forming a strategic partnership with their facility manager customers.

Any vendor or supplier can offer discounts on the products and equipment they sell. Look for the vendors that offer added value in the form of training, services, or warranties. By forming these partnerships, you'll be able to reduce labor costs long term as well as in the short term.

1. 2022 CMM In-House/Facility Management Benchmarking Survey Report
2. Facilities Management Cost Trends Report 2022, CBRE Group, Inc.

3. Rutala WA, Gergen MF, & Weber DJ. Microbiologic evaluation of microfiber mops for surface disinfection. Am J Infect Control 2007
4. University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health "Safe cleaning and disinfection during the COVID-19 pandemic: The role of Janitors in the safe re-opening of California", 2021
5. Mieke Koehoorn, Aleck Ostry, Shahadut Hossain & Judy Village. Injury risk associated with physical demands and school environment characteristics among a cohort of custodial workers, Ergonomics, 2011

[See more Facilities solutions](#)