

TOPIC: IDENTIFYING FIBER WITH A BURN TESTING

Burn testing was one of the first skills veteran carpet cleaners learned, like learning to walk. But fewer and fewer carpet (and upholstery) cleaners practice this skill, and fewer still realize the marketing value of performing a burn test in front of the customer and being able to discuss the special and specific cleaning needs of the fiber being examined. **This is the procedure in short form.**

TIPS:

- Use a butane lighter so that the lighter is not adding an odor. Using a match would add the odor of burning Sulphur.
- Do the test over a saucer, sink, ash tray or some surface where it will not cause trouble if a few strands of hot fiber drip down.
- Hold the fiber being tested with a paper clip or alligator clip. Do not hold with fingers as the smell of burning flesh throws off the results.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Light the lighter.
2. Slowly bring the fiber toward the flame but do not touch the flame, yet. Look to see if the fiber shrinks back and melts as it gets close to the flame. Melting indicates some type of plastic or synthetic fiber.
3. Let the fiber contact the flame. Observe how rapidly or slowly it burns. Observe the color(s) of the flame. Observe the amount and color of the smoke.
4. Remove the flame. See if the fiber goes out. If it does, it is likely wool. Some silk will also go out by itself.
5. Blow out the burning fiber. Observe the color of the smoke, the amount of smoke. Check the odor.
6. Allow several seconds for the fiber to cool down. What color is the burnt portion? Squeeze the burnt ember lightly between the fingers. Is there ash that leaves black soot on your fingers? Is the ember more like a hard bead or a soft crushable bead?
7. The observations in these steps can be matched to the chart for a final determination of the fiber.

