

Color-safe oxygen bleaches help you remove more stains.

Drycleaners and launderers can use generic oxygen bleaches to offer their customers more complete stain removal. These bleaches will help remove residual stains on garments and make you, the operator, look like a hero to your customer by removing more stains! Color-safe oxygen bleaches should be used after the exhaustion of other means of conventional stain removal.

Conventional stain removal is accomplished in four steps:

1. Remove oils from the stain. The presence of oil can be a barrier to the use of other water-based stain removers.
2. Remove tannins from the stain.
3. Remove proteins from the stain.
4. Remove any remaining residual dye (usually a "yellow stain") with a color-safe oxygen bleach.

I have walked into many drycleaning plants where the operator doesn't keep any kind of bleach on premises. If you aren't bleaching, you are most likely leaving residual stains on your garments. Use the following generic oxygen bleaches to add value to your service by helping to remove those pesky residual dye stains. These bleaches are safe to use on most colors.

Sodium Perborate is an inexpensive powder oxygen bleach that is most often used as a soak or an additive in a wash cycle. Sodium perborate can be used to remove general residual yellow stains from shirts. It is alkali and is great for soaking shirts, lab coats, and cotton blends. Allow at least an hour to soak with warm to hot water. **DO NOT USE** sodium perborate on wools or silks. The alkalinity can cause yellowing or even dissolve the yarn of loose knit wools leaving small holes. Sodium perborate is used as a color-safe additive in some retail laundry soaps. If your garment appears stiff after soaking in sodium perborate, add a little acetic acid to your rinse cycle to neutralize, then rinse and add conditioner to soften it.

Sodium Percarbonate is also a powder oxygen bleach that performs similarly to sodium perborate. It tends to work a little faster and may be more aggressive. Use it similarly to sodium perborate. Again, **DO NOT USE** sodium percarbonate on wools or silks. Sodium percarbonate tends to dissolve in water rather well (better than sodium perborate). I learned a neat trick regarding using it on the spotting board: place a clean handkerchief flat on the spotting board. Then take a teaspoon or two of percarbonate and place it in the center of the handkerchief. Close the kerchief around the percarbonate, and twist the handkerchief so that the percarbonate remains in a tight ball. Hold the "ball" close over your fabric's stained area, and fog the ball lightly with steam, so percarbonate melts through the handkerchief and on to the stain. Let the garment stand, and examine a half hour later. Repeat if necessary.

Hydrogen Peroxide can be a very important tool. It is usually in liquid form, so it is convenient to keep on the spotting board. It can also be used in a soak. Hydrogen Peroxide is an oxygen bleach that normally has a neutral pH. Because it is neutral, it can be used with many wools and silks, as long as these garments can take water-based treatments. Be careful with silks that have a shiny finish, because the shininess on the material is sometimes a water-based sizing. The sizing can dull when water-based treatments are applied. Hydrogen Peroxide is available in concentrations of 25%-30% from your supplier, 8%-10% from a beauty supply store, or 3% from a local drug store. 3% is least aggressive, but requires the longest dwell time. 8%-10% is quite sufficient to safely bleach out small residual yellow stains. 25%-30% can be useful if you mix it 2/3 water to 1/3 peroxide in a spotting bottle. When using hydrogen peroxide as a direct application spotter, leave plenty of time for the bleaching action to work.

Hydrogen peroxide in a soak can help remove mildew from colored garments. A soak can also help remove multiple residual stains at one time. This method saves the labor required to work the stains individually on the spotting board. For a soak: mix a neutral lubricant like RiteGo (a couple ounces in a 5 gallon pail), water, and a cup of the peroxide concentrate. Then soak the garment (or garments) overnight. An old beverage cooler is a good soaking chamber, because it keeps warm water warmer, longer. Warm temperatures and longer soaking times help the hydrogen peroxide to work more thoroughly.

Come back for my next blog post about using other non-color-safe oxygen bleaches, followed by a discussion on the importance of reducing bleaches.

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