

You Can Judge by the Cover

WHEN IT COMES TO PADDING FLATWORK IRONERS, YOU get what you pay for. When you buy for price, you are sacrificing value and longevity. Add to this the time and labour it takes to install the padding, and pinching pennies doesn't make sense. While flatwork ironers have essentially remained unchanged for over 100 years, there have been changes in the textiles used to cover the rolls and the belting that move the linen into and out of the machine.

WHAT'S IN A PAD?

High-production ironers come in two styles: modern 'large-roll' and traditional 'small-roll' machines. Each uses a different type of padding. American small-roll ironers use a pad and cover combination. Pads and covers are made from materials ranging from cotton, polyester, asbestos, and most recently to aramid (e.g., Nomex®). Modern or large-roll ironers take a needled-felt covering. Polyester and aramid materials are used to construct a felt covering that wraps around the rolls several times. In general, this type of ironer does not need a separate cover because the needled-felt, installed over spring padding, acts as both pad and cover.

NEW AND IMPROVED

Recent developments in polyester have produced a highly permeable needlefelt for large-roll ironers. This fabric can resist the effects of hydrolysis (the decomposition of a chemical compound by reaction with water) as well as resisting stretching. Large-roll ironers with few and fast-turning rolls are very harsh on their coverings. By using stronger yarns and re-engineering the staple fibres, manufacturers have been able to make a felt covering that can breathe and dry better than standard coverings. In addition, this covering does not require trimming after installation and is long-lasting. These improvements cost more and are worth it, because the cost of the covering, in the overall operating budget of the ironer, is minuscule. Small-roll ironers can also benefit from modern needlefelt padding. Often called Permapads®, these offer substantial benefits over traditional knitted pads because they maintain their weight and density well, are more resilient and do not compress as quickly as other padding. But when it does compress, needlefelt padding will not decompose into the springs of the machine, creating the possibility of damage to the springs when removed.

Aramid felt covers are also available for small-roll ironers. Being non-woven, non-directional and thicker, an aramid felt cover offers tremendous value when compared to traditional woven covers: a thicker construction helps maintain roll circumference and adds durability to the cover because it resists tearing. In addition, the finishing process of felt covers allows a roughened surface to provide traction for feeding linen into the rolls. This often eliminates the need to use expensive specialty traction covers on the first few rolls.

BEYOND THE COVER

Needlefelt technology has spread to include belting for ironers, feeders and folders. Polyester felt belting is thicker, more durable, resists abrasion and will not fray or shrink. Stretching is less than 1%! Special anti-static construction allows felt belting to be used on the 'dry side' of an ironer too – blended with steel fibres. The belt grounds itself as it turns and drastically reduces static electricity. Because the belting will not fray, holes can be punched in it for use on vacuum feed tables. Polyester felt belts are available in endless and laced form.

THE BOTTOM LINE

These new advances with polyester and aramid fibres, along with new manufacturing processes, have improved ironer textiles of all kinds. The benefits offered always outweigh the cost of the goods. It is important to recognize the difference between value and economy. Just as consumers do not resist higher prices in cars due to added safety and fuel consumption features, laundry operators must not resist higher prices in ironer textiles that offer increased life, less downtime, and higher production capacities.

A routine maintenance program is vitally important in the operation of any ironer. Proper chest care is as important as the proper selection of padding. Without it, any pad or cover will have a drastically reduced life and produce poor quality.

You can find tips and suggestions regarding pads and covers by visiting <http://www.cramerco.net> and clicking on 'news & tips'. ■

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