

THE EVOLUTION OF WINDOW CLEANING

By Johan le Roux, Specialised Cleaning Technical Manager

For years, window cleaning was a straightforward task, traditionally carried out with the help of a ladder, bucket and 'squeegee'.

But architectural designs are fast becoming complex and energy sources are also changing. As a result, window cleaners are expected to tackle other surfaces as well, including solar panels, entrance glasswork, atriums and indoor windows. This has done nothing but exacerbate the challenges associated with window cleaning.



Innovative solutions

Customers are increasingly looking for solutions for a variety of new cleaning issues. For example, people are looking for systems that will help them clean in between narrow spaces or tackle hard-to-reach areas such as overhanging façades and domes. There is also an increasing demand for cleaning systems tailored for interior windows. Cleaning glasswork in high-rise buildings, using abseiling or rope access and gondola systems, cherry pickers or scaffolding work, has also increased significantly.

There is also a growing demand for ergonomic and environmentally friendly cleaning tools that make the work easier to carry out. A good example is the i-Suit® from i-Team Professional. This is a framework, worn by the operator, with a pulley system that carries the weight of the cleaning extension poles, so that the operator only has control of the movement of the pole system. This allows for extended working hours without the fatigue usually associated with window cleaning.

The system comes with a pair of specially designed glasses that enable the operator to look up without bending his neck backwards.

Many suppliers have developed water-fed telescopic poles that can be used to clean windows and structures up to 18 metres high. These systems make use of a water purification system that removes all impurities, minerals and salts from the water. When glass is cleaned with the purified water, it dries without leaving any droplet marks or streaks behind. The biggest advantage of the system is that it is very safe, as work can be done from ground level. It is also a lot quicker than using other access methods.

Other developments saw the combination of the traditional 'squeegee' with the window washer. Essentially, the operator washes and dries the glass in one single movement. This method has an enormous impact on the productivity of the operators.

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What about solar panels?

The cleaning and the maintenance of solar panels were initially believed to be unnecessary, as these surfaces were said to be 'self-cleansing'. However, with weather conditions and air pollution leaving their mark on solar panels, cleaning them has become a new and urgent priority. To optimise their efficiency, solar panels need regular cleaning with the right equipment to help maintain an elevated level of electricity yield. Cleaning can increase the efficiency of photovoltaic panels by up to 30 per cent.

Many manufacturers are now offering a complete system for cleaning façades and solar power installations, incorporating rotating roller heads and brushes, plus multipurpose telescopic lances. The accessories can be used with high-pressure cleaners, connected to a hose for clean water applications or linked to a vacuum for removing loose dirt.

At the recent Interclean show in Amsterdam, one company displayed a prototype drone that cleans windows remotely. Unfortunately, due to our strict aviation legislations, this is not a technology that will be available in South Africa in the near future. That said, there are plenty opportunities for South Africa to manufacture cleaning technology that is unique to its needs.

