



**COMPANY:**

Physical Resources Department, University of Guelph

**LOCATION:**

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

**EMPLOYEES:**

140

## CIMS Helps University of Guelph's Physical Resources Department Sharpen Customer Service

At the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, the Physical Resources department builds, operates and maintains the physical assets of the university and provides quality services that support the needs of the university community. For Ed Martin and his team, that means cleaning the institution's 120 buildings, including the library, athletic facilities, classrooms and research buildings, each of which has unique needs and demands special attention.

Preparing to achieve certification to ISSA's Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS) helped Physical Resources connect with the university's key building managers in a new way and in doing so, allowed the department to better fill the managers' varying needs, says Barb Baxter, who directed the CIMS process within the department.

"We always had a good relationship with our customers, but this allowed us to be much more customer focused," Baxter explains.

Instead of simply conducting building inspections and responding to issues and problems internally within the department, CIMS encouraged greater client participation in the process. Baxter made contact with several key building managers and explained the CIMS process, asking if they would like to participate. That gave them an opportunity to talk about the cleaning service they were receiving in more detail than ever before.

"Now we meet regularly, ask about problems and situations, ask the clients for suggestions, and are better able to deal with shifting customer priorities," explains Martin. "We're even working with some building managers by giving them an inspection sheet. They do an inspection, we do an inspection, and then we compare notes about what we found. CIMS has created a real team approach to things."

Baxter adds, "Through this process, we found that we were focusing on areas we thought were important, but by talking to customers, we learned that they were more interested in us doing other things." She points to the university library as one example.

"In cleaning the library, we were focusing on garbage, the floors, washrooms, and study carrels," she says. "But when we talked to the building manager, we found that they also have a lot of meetings taking place in the library and they were interested in getting the tabletops in the meeting rooms cleaned, too."

Martin further notes that the CIMS process has highlighted the need to work hand-in-hand with the building manager with regard to what the customer was willing and able to pay for. Working with CIMS has helped clarify that while the building manager may desire and request additional service, such a request does not mean that the Physical Resource department has carte blanche to provide them the service regardless of the cost.

Martin explains that because the university is a public institution and receives public — taxpayer — funds, strict budgetary guidelines must be followed. Delivering excellent service under such budgetary parameters can prove difficult, but CIMS has helped make the situation easier to handle.

"We can't just throw increased labor hours at problems," Martin says. "CIMS helped us give better customer service with the same or less staff by allowing us to focus tightly on customer needs."

“ We are a public institution, and we always have to look at whether or not the taxpayers are getting the most bang for their buck. Because of CIMS, we have all of our documentation and information in one place, and an outside assessor from ISSA — which is a very credible, professional international outfit — has judged us as a company of excellence. We can point to that, showing that we do deliver the bang for the buck.”

~Ed Martin,  
University of Guelph

**BEST TIP  
FOR COMPANIES  
THINKING ABOUT  
CERTIFICATION:**

*Involve customers in the process if they are willing to participate. Working together promises to develop better relationships.*

Baxter once again points to the library example as illustrative, noting that because the building manager identified the need for Physical Resources to clean the tabletops regularly, the frequency of other services, such as cleaning of study carrels, had to be adjusted, given the inability to increase staff or service hours. Ultimately, Physical Resources and the building manager jointly agreed to these service changes to meet the daily cleaning needs.

"We were able to work with the building manager to find a priority list that covered everything he needed us to cover and stayed within our budget," she says.

Martin notes that this is the first time in his 30-plus years with the university that all of his department's documentation has been compiled together in one place.

"We've always known we had great training and cutting edge service" he says. "We began working towards being green approximately 20 years ago by starting a fine paper recycling program in our office and computer areas, we also have been using high filtration vacuum bags and have invested in quality equipment, but having an outside assessor confirm it meant a lot to us."

CIMS certification has also helped his department in another area — public accountability.

"CIMS really helped us with accountability," he says. "We are a public institution, and we always have to look at whether or not the taxpayers are getting good value. Because of CIMS, we have all of our documentation and information in one place, and an outside assessor from ISSA— which is a very credible, professional international outfit — has judged us as a company of excellence. We can point to that, showing that we do deliver good value for dollars spent. We're accountable to the taxpayers for what we're doing."

"CIMS has opened up the opportunity for the networking of global partners that have also gone through the CIMS certification process. We will all learn from each others' successful and not-so successful steps along the way." 

## About CIMS:

CIMS is the first comprehensive management and operations standard for cleaning organizations. Administered by ISSA and the American Institute for Cleaning Sciences, CIMS is a standard of excellence designed to help building service contractors and in-house service providers develop quality, customer-centered organizations.

The CIMS framework is built around five quality principles that have proven to be the hallmarks of well-managed, successful cleaning operations:

- Quality Systems
- Human Resources
- Management Commitment
- Service Delivery
- Health, Safety & Environmental Stewardship

Why should a company certify to CIMS? Daniel Wagner, director of CIMS for the ISSA, explains: "Implementation of the standard's elements affords an organization a tremendous opportunity to validate its management systems and processes. Professional, customer-centered cleaning organizations finally have a touchstone resource, a common rallying point around which all members of the industry can gather and work toward achieving an unprecedented level of professionalism and excellence."

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