

## WOOL (Above-The-Floor)

### WHAT IS WOOL?

Wool is a protein fiber which comes from the fleece of the sheep or lamb, Angora goat or Cashmere goat and which has never been reclaimed from any woven or felted wool products. The term “wool” may also be used to describe specialty fibers from the hair of camel, alpaca, llama and vicuna.

Wool occurs naturally in a variety of shades from white and cream to brown and black.

### SHADE CHANGES ARE NOT UNCOMMON

Many times wool is bleached at some point in the fabric manufacturing process. After installation these bleached fibers have a tendency to undergo a process called “photoyellowing”. Sunlight (UV light) and various other factors such as atmospheric pollutants can cause these white fabrics to gradually change shade. Alkaline cleaning chemicals tend to aggravate photoyellowing.

A related phenomenon, which is more common to “natural” wool yarns (yarns which have not been bleached or dyed), is called “photobleaching”. As the name implies, this process is a light-induced color change whereby the wool becomes **whiter** (technically, it becomes less yellow). Interestingly, this type of color change has been found to occur with visible blue light, especially where the UV component of the light is low.

Dyed wools are also susceptible to fading when exposed to direct sunlight.

### CONTRACT FABRICS

In addition to its residential uses, wool is a very popular fiber for contract applications, owing largely to its inherent flame resistant properties. Most commonly, wool is blended with smaller amounts of synthetics such as nylon, giving the fabric greater strength. The fabric below is an example of a 100% wool product.



### CARE OF WOOL

Wool is not difficult to maintain if it is addressed on a regular basis. Because airborne dust and soils often get trapped in the many air pockets found in the weave of wool fabrics, it is necessary to vacuum regularly. Vacuuming is also a must before total cleaning is performed.

Alkaline chemicals should **not** be used on wool because they weaken the fiber and can cause alkaline burns or yellowing that may not be correctable. If an alkaline chemical is necessary, it **must** be neutralized with an acid, not just rinsed with water.

Because wool is a protein fiber, enzymes (digestive cleaners) should never be used. Chlorine bleach will completely dissolve wool and is not safe even in a diluted form.

## **PETS AND WOOL**

Pet stains caused from vomit and urine can be very damaging to wool. Vomit contains enzymes that are there to break down the protein food consumed by the animal. These enzymes can also damage wool, a protein fiber.

Urine from pets is also a problem because bacteria can convert urine from an acid to an alkali in their digestive process. The alkali comes from the ammonia gas that is a by-product of the bacteria. This alkali is one of the elements that damages the wool fiber.

## **SPOT CLEANING**

Spot cleaning should be approached with great care. Bleeding of colors, abrasion marks and shrinkage all need to be considered when spot cleaning.

Shrinkage from wet-side cleaners is likely, especially on loose fabric such as arm covers and skirts.

Hair dryers **set on cool or warm** can be used to speed-dry the dampened areas to reduce shrinking possibilities.

Dry-cleaning solvents are generally safe and will not cause shrinking.

## **ON THE BRIGHT SIDE**

From an aesthetic perspective, wool offers a certain soft, elegant look, which creates a feeling of warmth. Also, wool is inherently flame resistant, a good soil hider, very resilient and is somewhat resistant to acid-type damage (unlike cellulosic fibers).

Topical treatments can benefit wool by reducing the absorbency of the fiber, making permanent staining less likely.

**AS WITH ALL FABRICS AND FINISHES...  
ALWAYS TEST THE CHEMICAL OR  
PROCEDURE FIRST IN AN  
INCONSPICUOUS PLACE.**