

Tampa house cleaners provide boon for busy homeowners

by Nick McLain

FOR EMILY WILLIAMS of St. Petersburg, hiring a regular house cleaner offers peace of mind. More than a decade ago, Williams began hiring house cleaners as she juggled work obligations and care for her elderly mother. But the companies didn't always impress her. "One didn't even bring their own equipment or supplies — they had to use mine," she says.

Eight years ago, the Angie's List member hired A-rated FairyDust Services of St. Petersburg. "I consider it a gift to myself to come home to order

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out of the ruckus of life," says Williams, who pays \$130 for a twice-weekly cleaning.

Whether you need regular service or an occasional deep clean, experts say you can ensure your hunt for a house cleaner goes well. Donna Brown, owner of FairyDust, suggests asking for proof of insurance, especially liability, to help determine

whether a company is reputable. "If someone gets hurt while on your property and they don't have coverage, it means the homeowner is now liable," Brown says.

Chuck Terpstra, owner of highly rated The Cleaning Pros in New Port Richey, works as a reserve officer for the Tampa Police Department. He suggests homeowners inquire whether a potential provider holds a fidelity bond or commercial crime insurance policy to cover them in the event of a theft by an employee. Terpstra also conducts thorough background checks of his employees, and suggests avoiding companies that can't provide references or proof of insurance. "It's cheaper now for some to create a nice website to hide behind, and when the homeowners get burned by them, it gives everyone in our industry a bad name," he says.

Also be sure to mention any allergies or chemical sensitivities that might affect your family. Most companies offer green cleaning programs and nontoxic products, according



Photo courtesy of Chuck Terpstra | Employees of The Cleaning Pros leave a sheen and shine on a client's home in New Port Richey.

to the Association of Residential Cleaning Services International, a nonprofit educational and advocacy group. “Quite frankly, we’re seeing more and more that cleaning is becoming a health issue as much as an aesthetic one,” ARCSI executive director Ernie Hartong says.

Visit arcsi.org to see which companies belong to the organization, which requires members to adhere to a code of ethics, including a pledge to comply with applicable laws, deal promptly and courteously with consumer complaints and offer fair prices.

Experts say the price for a cleaning varies depending on the size of the home and other factors. You should budget about

\$80 to \$150 per session for a twice-weekly cleaning. Terpstra says his average cost for a deep cleaning is about \$175.

Member Jennifer Carter of Riverview finds the \$150 she pays A-rated A Home Maid Clean in Tampa for twice-weekly cleaning, plus a few extras, worth the expense. “It was a matter of not having enough time and my house was showing it,” says Carter, who appreciates the respect the workers demonstrate in accommodating her busy in-home video-editing business. “Having clients come here and see a well-kept house is very important.”^B



Check angieslist.com to find highly rated house cleaners in your area.