

# Don't get taken to the cleaners

We dish the dirt on how much you should expect to pay for a domestic cleaner, how to recognise a good one and what jobs they should do

CLEANING AGENCIES		
	AVERAGE PRICE PER HOUR (£) (EXCL VAT)	PRICE RANGE (£) (EXCL VAT)
EAST ANGLIA (23)	10.00	8.51-12.75
MIDLANDS (25)	9.36	8.50-10.21
NORTHERN IRELAND (28)	8.51	7.54-10.00
NORTHEAST (24)	8.56	7.43-11.08
NORTHWEST (27)	8.51	8.29-10.00
SCOTLAND (10)	9.25	8.06-12.14
SOUTHEAST (including London) (24)	10.00	8.30-10.67
SOUTHWEST (23)	9.57	7.87-10.21
WALES (24)	8.17	7.39-8.95

PRIVATE CLEANERS		
	AVERAGE PRICE PER HOUR (£) (EXCL VAT)	PRICE RANGE (£) (EXCL VAT)
MIDLANDS (9)	7.66	6.81-9.36
NORTH (including Scotland) (8)	8.30	6.70-9.10
SOUTH (including London) (9)	6.81	5.96-7.66

Sample size in brackets

**H**ectic lifestyles and a desire for more free time mean that getting help around the home can seem like an attractive option. The number of people who say they pay for domestic help has risen from 15 per cent to 24 per cent since 2000.

To give you an idea of how much you should pay for a cleaner, we called private cleaners and agencies across the UK and asked them to estimate how much it would be to regularly clean a three-bedroomed home. For agencies, we've looked at nine separate UK regions. For private cleaners, we've looked at three broader regions because of the difficulty of finding a sufficient number.

## Regional costs

We found that prices can vary widely around the country. The highest estimates came from the South – for an agency cleaner in Stevenage and a private cleaner in Bournemouth, we were quoted more than £20. The cheapest quote came from Scotland – just £4.26 an hour (excl VAT) for a private cleaner. The cheapest agencies we found were in Northern Ireland and East Anglia at about £5.50 an hour (excl VAT).

By comparison, the legal minimum wage for UK workers aged 22 and over is £5.35 an hour. For 18- to 21-year-olds, £4.45 and for 16- to 17-year-olds it's £3.30.



Kim and Aggie from Channel 4's hit show *How clean is your house?*

## Time taken

In our survey, we found the average amount of time quoted for the job was two hours 45 minutes for agency cleaners. The average for private cleaners was just over two hours 20 minutes. It's not that strange to find that average prices for agencies in London and the Southeast were among the most expensive, but we were rather surprised to find the average price quoted for private cleaners in the South was £3.19 an

## Our research

In November and December 2006, we called a random sample of cleaning agencies from [www.yell.com](http://www.yell.com) and private cleaners advertising in local papers and on classified ads website [www.gumtree.com](http://www.gumtree.com). We asked them to quote their hourly rate to clean a three-bedroomed house. The price ranges were calculated by ignoring the 25 per cent most expensive and the 25 per cent cheapest estimates.

## How to spot a keener cleaner

### Expert advice from the British Institute of Cleaning Science

Once you've found a cleaner, how do you know whether they're worth their Domestos? John Butler (pictured), Chairman of the British Institute of Cleaning



Science (BICS), says that a good cleaner will respect your home: 'They should return any furniture or ornaments they move to their original place.' In addition, the BICS has produced a helpful checklist. It says a good cleaner will:

- remove all dust even if it's at high or low levels
- clean toilets properly
- make sure they don't leave any detergent residues
- use the right product for the right surface
- accept your preferences for the way you want things done.



hour less than the average for an agency in the Southeast. On average, private cleaners were cheaper than the agencies.

Most cleaners we spoke to were happy to give an estimate over the phone but you might find some will want to see your house to assess how much work needs to be done. Before you call for an estimate, think about exactly what you'll want them to do (see 'Getting on with the job', right).

You should also ask how they expect to be paid – some cleaners will offer a discount for cash, others prefer to be paid by cheque, direct debit or standing order. Some agencies asked us to pay the cleaner in cash per visit and pay the agency an additional monthly fee. Some cleaners will suggest they do a one-off 'spring clean' before regular cleaning sessions to set a standard to maintain. This may be more expensive than regular work.

If you are unhappy with the standard of cleaning, tell the cleaner or agency what you expect. If things don't improve, don't be afraid to find a replacement.

## Your rights

### What to do in case of a cleaner misdemeanour

Some cleaners and agencies will have their own public liability insurance. This means that if the cleaner breaks something, or spills bleach on your carpet, for example, you'll be covered by their insurance.

If you have accidental damage cover as part of your own contents insurance, you should also be covered. Some contents insurance will cover you for stolen items even if you've let someone have access to your home (that is, given them a key), as long as you've taken reasonable precautions to protect your goods. Others will cover you only in case of violent entry. Phone your insurance provider before you employ a cleaner to find out exactly what you are and are not covered for, especially if the cleaner will be coming while the house is empty.



## Getting on with the job

### The tasks a cleaner should do and how often

You should always agree in advance with your cleaner exactly what is and isn't expected, but here are a few of the jobs that will often be covered and some that you might want to consider if you have a cleaner on a regular basis.



#### Jobs that will generally be included

**Kitchen** Cleaning down surfaces including cupboards; cleaning the microwave (inside and out), washing machine, tumble drier, dishwasher, kettle, toaster and hob

**Living room/bedroom** Cleaning mirrors, pictures, fireplace, tables, cabinets, window ledges and skirting boards; dusting surfaces; polishing wood; vacuuming carpets

**Bathroom** Cleaning bath, sink and shower; polishing tiles, mirror, and skirting boards; cleaning toilet (inside and out); washing the floor and dusting shelves

**Jobs to do on a less frequent basis** Cleaning the inside of food cupboards; cleaning inside the fridge and inside the oven; cleaning inside of windows

**Jobs to discuss with your cleaner** Defrosting the freezer; washing up; loading and unloading the dishwasher; changing water in vases and watering plants; ironing clothes; changing sheets making the beds; polishing brass and silverware

## Checklist

### How to find and keep a good cleaner

■ **Use your contacts** Try to take recommendations from friends and family. If you can't, you should be able to find details of cleaners and agencies in local papers, *Yellow Pages* and on the web. It's wise to get three quotes.

■ **Interview** Try to interview all prospective cleaners in your home, even if they're from an agency. You might prefer to have someone with you for security.

■ **Check up** Even if you're employing someone from a recommendation, ask for references and make it clear you'll check them.

■ **Make a list** Make sure you discuss in advance what you want the cleaner to do, including any preferences you have for how things should be done. There are no rules about what a cleaner should do. Write a list and agree it beforehand.

■ **Whose products** Ask whether cleaning materials are included – we found some variation in what was provided. Sometimes the cleaner will bring all equipment; some will charge you extra to use their materials and others prefer to use yours.

■ **Tax** If you employ someone in your home, you may legally be their employer. If you are, you may have to deduct income tax and National Insurance from their wages through the pay as you earn (PAYE) scheme. This might not apply if the cleaner is 'self-employed' and different rules apply to workers supplied by agencies. If you're not sure about the status of someone who works for you, talk to the status officer at your tax office.

■ **Tidy up** Depending on what you want done, it may be wise to tidy up before the cleaner comes – if there's lots of tidying to do, then you might find that the cleaning is less thorough.