

**COMPANY:**  
UNICCO Service Company

**HEADQUARTERS:**  
Newton, MA

**EMPLOYEES:**  
18,000

**SERVICE AREA:**  
Throughout the U.S. and Canada



## CIMS Certification Adds Layer of Trust for UNICCO Clients

For nearly 60 years, UNICCO has delivered best-in-class facilities maintenance services in a wide variety of markets, including corporate, commercial, plant services, manufacturing, education, retail, government, financial institutions and public venues.

The types of service performed by UNICCO for individual clients varies, but may include janitorial service, operations and maintenance, landscaping, lighting and office services. UNICCO strives to deliver such services efficiently, effectively, professionally, and if desired, in an environmentally-friendly manner in accordance with the UNICCO GreenClean® program. Customers may choose stand-alone offerings or bundle packages tailored to their specific facilities maintenance needs.

A 95 percent customer retention rate attests to the satisfaction of UNICCO's customers. The key to the company's success is incomparable innovation in both facility technology and leading-edge initiatives like the UNICCO GreenClean® program.

ISSA's new Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS) was an excellent fit with UNICCO's already-stringent policies focusing on management, environmental safety and operations, says Greg Zifcak, UNICCO supply chain manager. CIMS is a comprehensive management and operations standard of excellence designed to help building service contractors and in-house service providers develop quality, customer-centered organizations.

"Implementation of the standard's elements affords an organization a tremendous opportunity to validate its management systems and processes," says Daniel Wagner, director of CIMS for the ISSA. "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."

Zifcak initially brought the idea of complying with the Standard to senior executives at UNICCO. "Dan Wagner told me about this new certification and gave me an overview of it," says Zifcak. "It sounded like a positive step — a universal standard for the industry to be judged by — but at first we were a little skeptical. We didn't want it to be just a marketing tool, we wanted it to really mean something."

After further research into the CIMS certification process, that skepticism disappeared.

"One of the biggest points of value about this is, it is not ourselves judging our company," he says. "It's an outside source. The ISSA is the premier trade organization for our industry and our clients will be able to say: 'The ISSA judged them and they passed.' That has real value to us."

John Kennedy, UNICCO vice president of operations support, also saw the value in attaining certification to the Standard.

"We thought it would give us an opportunity to validate, via an outside source, our programs, policies and procedures," Kennedy explains. "We think we do a great job of delivering customer satisfaction, but we saw that it might be beneficial for an outside assessment to confirm it."

With 18,000 employees, UNICCO is such a large organization that robust policies and procedures had to be — and were — in place. "Because of our size, we had already crossed many of those bridges," says Zifcak.

But just having documentation in place didn't make the CIMS process easy or quick. "The process took us six months," notes Zifcak. "We really looked within and examined exactly what we were doing."

““ The CIMS certification is like the FDA seal of approval for the cleaning industry. It tells clients that an outside agency is watching, monitoring and has approved.””

~John Kennedy,  
Vice President of Operations Support,  
UNICCO Service Company

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

*Give each department head the section of the certification checklist that corresponds to his or her department. That way, when the assessor comes to your headquarters, you can have one meeting with all the department heads and simply go through the checklist in order.*

In the first phase of the process John Kennedy, who served as project manager for the CIMS certification, contacted the heads of all departments, including operations, human resources, environmental safety and others. He charged them with compiling and gathering the documentation necessary to achieve certification.

To assist organizations with the investigation, compilation and information-gathering process, ISSA provides companies with an easy-to-use CIMS self-assessment checklist. The checklist runs through the five cornerstone quality management principles, breaking them down into measurable policies, procedures and outcomes. For example, under the Human Resources category, checklist items include hiring practices, human resource policies, site-specific orientation, management training and others. Companies wishing to be certified must have written policies, procedures and plans corresponding to all of the checklist items.

"The checklist was the tool we utilized to break down assignments to individuals and departments," Kennedy explains. "I went to the department heads and said: 'Here is your section of the checklist,' and asked them to pull all of the necessary documentation together. It was used by us internally and also used by the assessor when that part of the process occurred."

Although UNICCO already had most of the necessary documentation, the process of gathering and compiling it led to some surprises. "It's like you're a chef, and you're working in your own kitchen with your own ingredients, implements and spices, but you're being asked to create a dish you've never prepared," Kennedy says.

Among the most interesting aspects of the process for Kennedy was seeing how UNICCO's policies and procedures can vary depending on the circumstances and the company's boundaries and limitations. "We already have performance indicators and standards in place for each of our client sites," he explains. "We mirror those performance indicators to client goals and missions in an effort to become a part of, and align ourselves with, our clients' missions, goals and bottom lines. It was interesting to see how our policies have come to be adapted to each customer's needs. Our customers are varied and their needs are varied. The process reinforced the need for us to have flexibility within the parameters of our policies and procedures at specific sites."

Greg Zifcak explains that through the process and the assessor's visit to various client sites, UNICCO found more or less what it expected and hoped to find.

"We thought we were ahead of the curve — we rate ourselves constantly via our standard operating procedures — but how do we really know how we're doing without an outside assessment?" he says. "Ultimately, we found we were doing more than we thought."

Zifcak believes that the industry as a whole, but especially smaller companies, will have to kick it up a notch because of CIMS.

"The markets for small business will change in this industry," he predicts. "Before, anyone with a van, a vacuum and a roll of paper towels could call themselves a cleaner. Now, with CIMS, those smaller companies will need to rise to a new standard."

Kennedy notes that the CIMS certification will function as a way for clients to choose one company over another.

"Clients are giving us the keys to their facilities," Kennedy says. "We have complete access to their businesses. A huge level of trust is involved there. Just like we do background checks on all of our employees, this CIMS certification is a way for clients to do a background check on us." [CIMS](#)

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

Why should a company certify to CIMS? Daniel Wagner, director of CIMS for 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."

**ISSA**<sup>®</sup>

The Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association

For more information contact  
800-225-4772 or visit  
[www.issa.com/standard](http://www.issa.com/standard).