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# CASE STUDY

## Oak Forest Hospital
## Oak Forest, IL

**Oak Forest Hospital uses Richards-Wilcox Safe Rail Conveyor System to improve Laundry Room operation.**

- Increased laundry throughput by 30%
- Eliminated system jams
- Decreased bag delivery errors

Richards-Wilcox Conveyor, Multiple laundry lanes accumulating bags.

Richards-Wilcox Conveyor, Frog Switches divert to multiple lanes for laundry accumulating

**Hospital Laundry Room increases capacity by 20-30% with Richards-Wilcox Safe Rail Conveyor System**

Oak Forest Hospital, a 600-bed facility, provides long term care and rehabilitation to patients in south suburban Cook County, Illinois. The 90 year old hospital was one of the first in the state to establish a program for ventilator-dependent individuals (persons who cannot breathe on their own). They currently provide care to a growing number of teenagers who are paralyzed by gunfire and require ventilator support. Oak Forest hospital is involved in outreach programs to curb teen violence in the community.

## THE CHALLENGES

The hospital's focus on special needs patients means that laundry processing is a large component of its daily operation. Towels, sheets, gowns, bed pads, and patient clothing are laundered in four mammoth-sized washers.

Oak Forest's old system, a flat track conveyor system, had been in operation for many years; it was rusty and jammed frequently. System replacement parts were no longer available.

Laundry workers resorted to using long wooden sticks to move bags along the track. Electronic switches malfunctioned much of the time, sending laundry to the wrong queue. Misdirected bags would wreck havoc with workflow because the laundry washes like items together. Incorrect bags would have to be taken down manually and carted to the proper queue. The workplace was chaotic and underproductive.



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# THE SOLUTION

Chief among the new system requirements was an efficient way to handle and queue the bags of laundry to individual areas for processing. The layout had to work around existing washers. Budgetary constraints were severe.

Richards-Wilcox designed and RW Distributor DESCO installed a Safe-Rail Overhead Conveyor system with five lanes of track, a Twin-Trak Slant Lift, drive unit, and carriers with five-position switches. This is how the new system works.

First the laundry is sorted into individual bags that will contain only towels, sheets, gowns, bed pads, or patient clothing, 75 pounds of laundry per bag. An operator loads a bag onto a carrier and identifies its content with the correct position on the carrier selector switch (position 1 = towels, position 2 = gowns, etc.). The bags are gravity fed into the Twin-Trak lift area and queued via gravity as one bag is powered up the lift. These bags then accumulate down to another queuing area via a hold back and release stop.

The operator activates a hand pull switch releasing one bag at a time and the carrier selector switch automatically trips the proper limit switch to open the specified lane. After the carrier travels through the lane it trips another switch to close the lane and the process repeats.

When all fives lanes have accumulated the 60 bags per wash run, workers grab bags and move them along the Safe Rail track, releasing the contents into the washer.

Empty bags on the carriers are gravity fed back to the load room, and accumulate at another hold back and release stop.

Oak Forest Hospital is very happy with its Richards-Wilcox, Conveyor System and the increased efficiencies it has yielded. The laundry room is able to handle up to 30% more laundry per day and, with the exception of operator error, has eliminated processing mishaps, putting the correct laundry bags in the proper lane. Now each cycle processes 4500 pounds of laundry and the hospital can handle 8 wash runs per day.

Empty Laundry Bag Returned to the Load Room



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