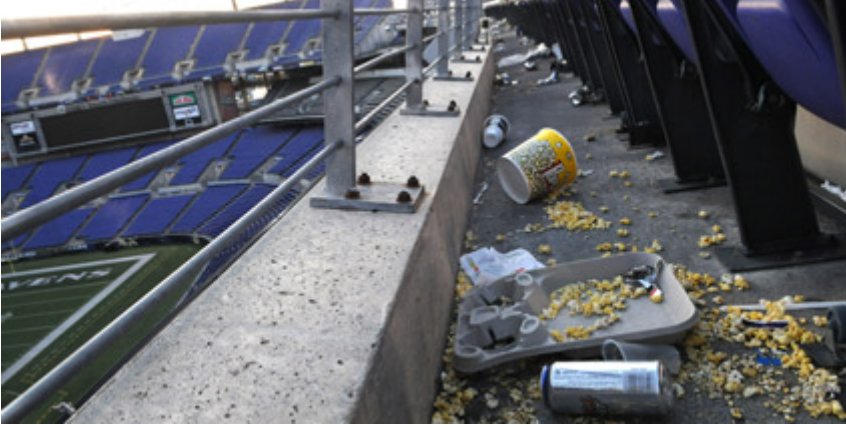


Bless this purple mess: Cleaning M&T Bank Stadium is a dirty job, but somebody's gotta do it



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Just a small fraction of the mess at M&T Bank Stadium after a Ravens game (BRIAN KRISTA, B)

If you've ever been to a Ravens game, you've shuffled through beer cans and peanut shells to get to your seat. You've seen trash cans spilling over their brims. And you've definitely fought to keep your nachos down as you used the restroom before the start of the fourth quarter.

But at the end of the game, when 70,000 fans leave M&T Bank Stadium, where does all that trash go?

As you're searching for your car in the parking lot or trying to cram yourself into a light rail car, Jeff Provenzano, director of football operations for the Maryland Stadium Authority, and his crews are already on it.

After all, they have only 72 hours to get the stadium sparkling clean for its next event.

"It's like taking the population of Towson and putting them together for the afternoon," said Provenzano of the crowds.

To sort out the mess, the Stadium Authority works with Chimes of DC, a nonprofit that employs disabled people, to tackle housekeeping duties at the stadium. "This is a mammoth task that occurs after every football game and is often overshadowed," Provenzano said.

On a typical football Sunday, 140 workers perform specialized cleaning tasks and remove 28 to 30 tons of trash from M&T Bank Stadium — “a pound per fan,” estimated Provenzano. About eight tons of that is recycled.

“Every stadium has its own character. They’re all different,” said Kerry Banks, project manager for Chimes, which handles multiple stadium contracts including Oriole Park at Camden Yards. “But you clean everything up the same way: Move trash.”



The cleaning crew gets to work (BRIAN KRISTA, B)

The process of cleaning the stadium’s bowl — from the cheap seats down to the sidelines — starts within two hours of the game’s final whistle. “We give the fans a chance to get out of the stadium before we turn [the workers] loose,” said Curt Salter, vice president of business development for Chimes, shortly after the Ravens’ last-minute loss to the Bengals on Oct. 11.

Starting at the top level of the stadium, workers of all ages — largely Hispanic — first pick cans and bottles out of each row. Another group follows closely behind, shoving trash (anything from half-eaten hot dogs to purple “Wacco 4 Flacco” signs) into big black garbage bags. Workers in utility vehicles grab the bags from the concourse and whisk them away to the bowels of the stadium to be compacted and placed in dumpsters.

“Everything is gone before it starts to smell,” said Salter, who, based on the aroma wafting from a nearby dumpster, was speaking relatively.

Once all the bleachers have been combed for waste, loud, massive air blowers are wheeled in and switched on to blow the leftovers down to the bottom of the bowl — they’re used in the stadium ramps and staircases, too. “You see that dust storm going,” said Chimes contract administrator Orrick Jones. “It’s pretty phenomenal.” Finally, each row is swept again by broom to get the little things. This whole process lasts until the wee hours of the next morning.

Meanwhile, other crews chip away at the inside of the stadium, including the locker rooms, luxury suites and some of the most disgusting bathrooms imaginable. “I’ve got a

lot of respect for my plumbers,” said Provenzano. The desensitized workers aren’t as grossed out as you would probably be.

Win or lose, the players get undressed and file out of the locker rooms fairly quickly, leaving socks, towels, food and yards and yards of white athletic tape all over the floor. Inside the office of Ravens coach John Harbaugh, some papers and three empty Diet Coke cans sit on his desk. Somehow, though, the locker rooms don’t smell all that bad. It usually takes the cleaning crew only about an hour to clean the Ravens’ and visitors’ locker rooms. “We only deal with trash,” Salter explained.

As trashed as the Ravens’ locker room was, Salter said a few of the stadium’s 126 luxury suites are sometimes a lot worse, with fans throwing food and empty bottles on the carpeted floor as if they were in the bleachers. “It’s ridiculous,” Jones said.

The entire process of getting M&T Bank Stadium ready for its next event — which includes intense detailing inside the stadium and also cleaning up the outside and Ravens Walk, but not the parking lots — takes two or three days and costs approximately \$50,000. Provenzano said the housecleaning takes about 3,000 total man hours, a number that varies based on attendance, weather and the opponent (rivalry games against the Steelers and Bengals are much messier than others). The outcome of the game is also a factor when disgruntled fans take their anger out on the stadium.

“The fans can be pretty unforgiving if things go south with the team,” said Provenzano.

When asked about when he’ll get home on this night — after the Ravens dropped a big game against a divisional foe — Provenzano chuckled before quipping, “We’ve got our own acronym for the NFL: No f—ing life.”

The five most disgusting things you’ll find after a Ravens game, according to Jeff Provenzano, director of football operations for the Maryland Stadium Authority:

1. Soiled pants: “At least once a season we discover undergarments and pants in a restroom stall representing what appears to be a bowel accident. We scratch our heads on how the individual left [the stadium without them].”
2. Vomit: “Always gross, with the severity dependent upon digested ingredients, is vomit. Each game there are numerous requests to have it cleaned up.”
3. Spoiled food: “A lot of food is transported throughout the stadium. Every now and then, some is forgotten and only discovered after the decomposition process commences with the appealing associated odors.”
4. The toilets: “With several hundred toilets, anything is possible in post-game inspections — some so gross you can’t help but appreciate the dirty job [done] by housekeeping and the plumbers.”

5. Not-so-cuddly critters: “Snakes, raccoons, possum, rodents, birds, dogs and cats can be sometimes found roaming the building to reap the rewards of trash left behind.”

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