A client called us recently to ask if we could help with a problem her family was having. It seems that they had just taken delivery on a new microfiber sofa. Visually, the sofa was a delight. However, when anyone sat on the sofa and walked across the room to go outside, touching the doorknob set off a spark that would immediately “get their attention!”

So why would a microfiber sofa create this kind of problem? More important, could anything be done to minimize the painful consequences?

What is Static?
In simple terms, static is a build-up of electrical charges. When two different materials come together, positive and negative charges are transferred from one material to another, resulting in one material becoming positively charged and the other negatively charged.

When you sit on a sofa and then get up, both you and the sofa carry this slight electrical imbalance. A “perfect storm” of conditions for building up significant charges might look like this:

- A cold, dry winter day
- Person wearing wool clothing
- Getting up from a microsuede sofa.

When all of these contributing factors come together, the effects can be dramatic.

Static on the Floor
Before we get into a discussion of remedies, it is interesting to note that static problems with floor coverings are largely a thing of the past.

Many years ago, when synthetic carpets were becoming widespread, anyone who had this type of carpet was acutely aware of the associated problem of static electricity. Walking across a room full of nylon carpet (or, even worse, a long hallway of carpet) could generate quite a surprise at the first touch of metal—or another person.

The chemical industry came to the rescue, offering anti-static treatments (usually through carpet cleaning companies) that did an adequate job of reducing static. These products were not permanent, however, and also suffered from the disadvantage of being somewhat sticky. This meant that solving the static problem tended to cause a different one: faster soiling of the carpet.

Perhaps one of the greatest technical leaps in the carpet industry came with the invention of the first anti-static nylon yarn. Tiny filaments of nylon (or other synthetic) with a carbon core are blended in small amounts with the normal nylon carpet fibers as the yarn is being made. The result is a carpet yarn that “drains” static charges away from the surface, much like a lightning rod.
Static on Furnishings
Unfortunately, upholstery fabrics are not created using anti-static fibers. Natural fibers do not typically exhibit the problem. However, polyester and other synthetic “microfibers” and “microsuedes”—very popular for both home and automobile upholstery—can contribute to static issues.

Careful with the Cure
So, back to the original problem of static related to a microfiber sofa. The thing many people are told to do is spray a diluted solution of fabric softener on the sofa. While we agree that this will solve the static problem, liquid fabric softeners dry to a gooey film. Not something you want to use on your sofa.

Likewise, we do not like the idea of the anti-static aerosol sprays. The ones we have tested tend to leave an unwanted residue.

A very simple fix for static is to create humidity. A humidifier will increase moisture in the air, reducing static charges. It certainly can’t hurt anything.

Another idea we like is lightly brushing the fabric with a dryer sheet such as “Bounce.” It will still leave a tiny amount of residue, but not enough to do any harm.

On the Bright Side
As always, the experts of your local Fiber-Seal Service Center are just a phone call away when you need assistance with the care of fine interior textiles. As you can see from this article, we answer questions that are not even related to Fiber-Seal. If we don’t already have the answer, we’ll help find it for you!

You can also connect with us on our social media networks!

Need Help With Fabric Cleaning Or Fabric Protection?
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Or, you can always give us a call at 214.333.9400 or email us at info@FiberSeal.com.