



Facilitator — April/May 2011



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Floor Maintenance

David Grossman

A Step Ahead

Remember the Importance of Thorough Floor Maintenance

Since flooring makes a significant impression on restaurant guests, it is important to devote time and attention to the appearance of this portion of the property. Putting in place a comprehensive plan for its upkeep— whether it is carpet, tile, stone, VCT or a combination—not only improves the guest experience but also serves to manage this large, expense item. Implementing a floorcare maintenance program increases the longevity of the assets and lowers capital expenditures.

With guidance from the Carpet and Rug Institute, a trade association, we have developed four key components of comprehensive commercial carpet, tile and grout care.

Preventative Measures

Restaurants focus tremendous effort on maintaining clean floors inside their property, but some attention also should go toward preventing dirt and debris from entering the building in the first place. Careful use of entranceway mats can help, especially in winter months.

An effective approach begins outside the property. Scrapertype mats remove the largest pieces of dirt and grit attached to shoes and boots. Next, immediately inside the entryway, a wellpositioned natural or grass mat absorbs moisture and smaller dirt particles. Lastly, a fiber mat placed deeper into the property traps some of the remaining soil and moisture before they come into contact with the hardfloor surface.

In addition to the type and placement of the mats, consider their length. According to the American Institute of Architects, 5 feet of matting will capture 33 percent of external soil entering a venue, 10 feet will capture 52 percent, 20 feet will capture 86 percent and 25 feet will capture nearly all the soil.

Once they are filled to capacity with dirt and debris, mats become counter-productive. Thus, mats should be cleaned regularly to maintain maximum effectiveness. This can be accomplished by vacuuming, laundering and replacing mats at various times and by having extra mats available when one set is being cleaned.

Frequent Housekeeping

Nothing beats regular vacuuming to reduce the soil load in carpet. In fact, an estimated 75 percent of the performance of carpet cleaning is in the vacuuming, so thorough, routine vacuuming is essential for solid carpet care.

Walking on soiled carpeting allows dirt particles to work their way below the surface of the pile where they are far more difficult to remove and can even damage the carpet fibers. For light soil loads, three passes of the machine suffices, but five to seven are necessary for heavily soiled areas. Changing the vacuuming direction occasionally also increases effectiveness.

Key vacuuming components include:

Machine selection. Shopping by price is a shortsighted strategy. An inexpensive machine may remove surface dirt but will not effectively remove the hidden dirt and particles embedded in the pile. For the specific model, consult with the carpet manufacturer for its recommendation, taking into consideration the type of carpet.

There are quality environmentally sensitive vacuum cleaners on the market. For a list, refer to CRI's Green program. Also, consider using HEPA vacuum bags. They are well-suited for allergy sufferers because they filter out almost all dust and pollens.

Vacuum manufacturers like to boast about the strength of their machines by promoting horsepower and amperage. Frankly, an engine's power and the electrical current required are almost irrelevant. What is more important is suction and airflow. A good machine is geared toward high performance on one of these metrics, depending on its intended usage. In general, it is best to use equipment with strong suction (such as 150 inch of water lift) for addressing liquid clean-ups. Conversely, a vacuum with a high airflow (such as 156 cubic feet per minute) is well suited for removing dry soil.

Frequency. A carpet or rug should be vacuumed anywhere from two to three times per week to at least daily, depending on factors such as the amount of foot traffic, the location of the carpet and its visibility.

Equipment operation and maintenance. Certain parts, such as beater bars and belts, should be checked regularly for wear. Also, bags should be changed when they are only three-quarters full to maximize suction. A machine should only be operated and maintained according to the manufacturer's specifications.

Similarly, hard surfaces should not be neglected. Tile and grout, a common surface, can be mopped a minimum of several times each week and, in some cases, more frequently. Tile is fairly easy to keep clean, even with a simple mild detergent. Grout needs more care due to its porous nature, which requires a stronger detergent and more elbow grease.

Spot and Spill Removal

Remove stains as needed, and be sure to treat them as soon as possible. The longer the contaminant sits, the more difficult it will be to eliminate and the more likely it is to become permanent. Many stains should be treated differently, and some actions can make the situation worse. It is advised to follow the manufacturer's recommendations or call an expert to assist.

Ever wonder why stains return almost immediately after eradicating them? A carpet dries from the bottom up. Even after the stain is removed, there can still be residual staining below the surface waiting to wick back to the surface during the drying process. Aiming an air-mover or carpet fan directly at the stain can reverse the drying process downward.

Restorative Cleaning

Schedule periodic deep cleaning to remove residues and trapped soil. To improve the aesthetics of the property, increase the carpet's longevity and minimize cleaning costs, deep cleaning should be performed before the soil is highly visible. Addressing the accumulation of fats, oils and grease is also important—especially in restaurants and other venues with food. They require stronger techniques than vacuuming.

There are several different types of restorative cleaning, ranging from hot-water extraction to low-moisture methods. While the former produces better results, cleaning without water—using an encapsulation or bonnet technique—sometimes can be used when a four- to six-hour dry time is not practical.

Regardless of methodology, the most critical step is identifying the low, medium and high-traffic areas so frequency can best be balanced with limited staff time and equipment. Again, it is prudent to consult the manufacturer's recommendations regarding the specific frequency within the common range of one to 12 times per year.

For tile and grout surfaces, the key decision regarding keeping the grout lines clean is whether to use an acid-based or an alkaline-based product. Each property can present unique challenges regarding the type of soiling and staining that is affecting the tile and grout. For example, many restaurants and kitchens have fats, oil and grease that have built up over time and discolored the grout lines. This type of soiling will require a high-alkaline product with the right dwell time to remove.

Bathrooms can present a whole different set of challenges since these areas have hard water deposits, detergent build that has accumulated over time and polymerized. An acid-based product is best used in these situations.

There are often dramatic differences in the coloring of grout lines because they are subject to varying amounts of foot traffic. Especially in a food environment, grout sealer is recommended because it prevents fats, oils and grease and dirt from penetrating the porous surface. Where applicable, an impregnator can be used to bring out the natural color.

While it may appear overwhelming, once this four-step maintenance plan is put into place, it is simply a matter of working it, occasionally revising it and then enjoying the impressive aesthetic, as well as financial, results.

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