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Greeting Your Customers with a High-Gloss Shine

By Robert Kravitz

It's been said, "If your floors shine, your facility shines."

Floors play a pivotal role in determining the impression building users have of a facility.

The hotel industry learned many years ago how important it is to have a high-gloss lobby floor to greet guests. "Clean,

shiny floors, they

found out, are

simply good for

business," says

James Hlavin,

Director of



Business Development for Tornado Industries,* a Chicago-

based manufacturer of floor care cleaning equipment.

“Facilities of all kinds are also realizing their importance,” says Hlavin, “and are following the hospitality industry, making sure their floors have a high-gloss, ‘wet-look’ appearance that greets building users at the door and is found throughout.”

Floors in busy buildings have specific needs that make it difficult to maintain a high gloss. They must endure heavy foot traffic, especially at entries; a variety of weather conditions; and soil and debris “walked in” to the building. “A facility’s floors must be cared for properly to keep their high-gloss appearance, or they can become costly to maintain—even dangerous to users,” says Hlavin. He suggests that facility service providers (FSPs) establish a floor care maintenance system that includes the type of equipment, products, and glosses used to help keep floors clean, shiny, and safe.

Busy facilities often specify that high-traffic floors be scrubbed and burnished nightly and that secondary floor areas, such as aisles or hallways, be scrubbed and burnished weekly, according to Hlavin. Smaller facilities usually require similar services, although less frequently—such as on a weekly, monthly, or even quarterly basis.

In both cases, at least once per year floors usually have all the old finish removed and new finished applied. “FSPs should question if this truly is the most cost-effective maintenance program for their floors,” says Hlavin. “They need to see if a new floor maintenance system employing different tools, finishes, and procedures can be implemented to make floor care easier and less costly, and at the same time preserve the floors’ high-gloss appearance longer.”

Canals in Floors

Traditionally, when a VCT (vinyl composition tile) floor is scrubbed with a rotary floor machine and scrubbing pad, small scratches, similar to hundreds of microscopic canals, are cut or scratched into the floor surface, explains Hlavin. Soil and moisture can become trapped in these small canals, and with time, dust from the building's HVAC system and soil tracked in by building occupants further damage the floor's appearance. "When this happens, the floor's gloss and luster are seriously diminished," he says.

Restoring a Floor's Luster

This "scratching" can become a major problem for many floors. To restore the floor—if it can be fully restored—requires floor care professionals to deep scrub the floor again, repeating the same procedure that created the problem in the first place, and then refinish the floor.

This procedure is not only costly and labor-intensive but can also be harmful to the environment. This is because traditional floor care chemicals comprise some of the strongest cleaning agents found in the industry, according to Hlavin. Breathing their vapors can be unhealthy to the floor care worker. In addition, pouring the harmful chemical residue generated from floor care maintenance down the drain affects waterways and the environment.

“If we can prevent the scratches from occurring in the first place, we can save building owners considerable sums of money, reduce the workload of the floor care technician, and have less impact on the atmosphere,” says Hlavin. To do this, Hlavin suggests that FSPs take the following steps:

- Vacuum rather than sweep or damp mop floors to better capture and remove dust and surface debris as thoroughly as possible.

- Use floor care machines with automatic or controllable dilution systems to regulate the amount of solution applied to the floors. This minimizes wasteful use of cleaning chemicals and resulting residue, minimizing the technicians' workload and lessening the impact of cleaning chemicals on the environment.
- Instead of using traditional floor care chemicals, consider a hydrogen peroxide citrus cleaner or chemicals certified by The EcoLogo Program and Green Seal, independent agencies that tests cleaning chemicals, among other products, to evaluate their effectiveness and to determine whether they are environmentally preferable. These products are safer for building occupants, floor care professionals, and the planet.

- Use a cylindrical floor scrubber/polisher instead of a rotary machine. Cylindrical floor care machines have soft brushes on each side of the machine, counter-rotating at 1,000 to 1,500 rpm (revolutions per minute) at 3.5 psi (pounds per square inch), which is six times the contact pressure of a rotary machine. Using a cylindrical machine helps alleviate the “scratching” problem. In addition, cylindrical machines tend to be easier for the floor care technician to use and maneuver, and they use 30 percent less cleaning solution than a rotary-type machine.
- Apply high-quality floor finish. A superior quality floor finish, though more expensive initially, pays dividends. In addition to producing a higher-gloss shine, better-

quality floor finishes help shield and protect the floor, keeping it looking its best for a longer period of time.

Protecting Floors

When an FSP takes these measures, the floor can look



great for several months. However, public facilities are still subject to all of the environmental conditions mentioned earlier, which can hamper the floor's appearance.

According to Hlavin, building managers should also implement

the following protective measures to keep floors looking their best:

- Use matting—it is essential. Depending on weather and location, mats as long as 20 feet should be

placed inside as well as outside all building entrances.

- Vacuum mats and carpets frequently throughout the day to keep them clean and remove grit before it becomes trapped within the mats' fibers.
- Provide easy access to all necessary floor care equipment including brooms, vacuums, mops, buckets, and chemicals.
- Establish written floor care standards and procedures to make clear how the building's floors are to be maintained and the quality and luster desired.
- Provide trash receptacles at all entrances to collect food, cigarettes, and drinks. If appropriate, place signs that these items are not allowed within the building.

- Patrol floors throughout the day to make sure stains, spills, and spots are mopped and removed as soon as they occur.

A Floor Care Maintenance System

“Implementing a floor care maintenance system is the best way to stay on top of a facility’s floor care needs,” says Hlavin. He adds that this system includes integrating all of the measures discussed here, maintaining ongoing surveillance of the floor for wear and tear, being prepared for and ready to handle floor care emergencies, having the right equipment all in good working order, and having a thorough knowledge of floor care chemicals, tools, and products. With all of these steps in place, following a floor care maintenance system keeps the building looking its best. “In addition, there’s a real sense of pride building managers and

occupants feel when their floors are looking great, greeting users with a high-gloss shine,” says Hlavin.

Robert Kravitz is a former building service contractor and now provides communication assistance to organizations in the professional building and cleaning industry.