



EDITORIAL

Grow your knowledge

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by Mark Cuddy *Added January 23, 2009*

The latest news about worship facilities is not the popularity of mega-churches, which have emerged over the past few years. Instead, the trend garnering the most attention is how worship facilities are becoming eco-churches, eco-synagogues, and eco-mosques. Suddenly, these facilities are starting to go “green”—and this does not appear to be a random phenomenon, but rather happening throughout North America and parts of Europe as well.

In the United Kingdom, for example, the Eco-Congregation Project is urging churches to take the lead in improving the local environment. Hundreds of churches have signed on to the program and—proving they have tackled a wide-range of Green and environmental issues—can now apply for an Eco-Award, honoring their accomplishments.

Although no such program has emerged in the United States, scores of churches are now doing their Green part here as well. For instance, a roof at the York-Ogunquit United Methodist Church near Portland, Maine, is covered

with solar panels to provide energy to light and heat the facility.

Nearby, the Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church is a self-proclaimed Green sanctuary. The church buys clean power to operate the complex, switched from paper to ceramic plates and cups, developed a successful ride-sharing program, and uses healthier, more environmentally responsible cleaning tools and products to maintain the facility.

There are several options worship facilities can consider to go Green. Although the solar panels on the Methodist church, mentioned earlier, cost more than \$60,000, many Green and sustainable measures cost very little if anything at all. However, most Green practices can have a powerful impact by making the facility healthier and more comfortable for building occupants.

After a facility decides to go Green, cleaning is usually a key focus. And, because floors are such a major component of a worship facility, systems, products, and procedures that make floor care more environmentally responsible—reducing cleaning’s impact on the environment—can prove very beneficial and be a major step in turning a conventional worship facility into a Green worship facility.

Starts at the Top and Out the Door

In most situations, the first step in turning a worship facility in a Green direction is for the decision to be made at the top. The organization’s board of directors, administrators, pastors, and other key members must get involved from the beginning. Usually this entails adopting a Green purchasing and operating policy, such as:

Beginning (date) all products and services purchased for the church will be environmentally preferable whenever and wherever possible. Additionally, these products will be certified by recognized Green certification organizations or meet the standards and guidelines of these organizations.

Once this decision is made, adopting a Green Floor Care Plan is a relatively easy next step. Usually, a Green Floor Care Plan begins at the door, involving the use of high-performance matting systems. High-performance means these mats are specially designed to trap and capture soils and contaminants at the door, helping to protect floors and the indoor environment. Often, these mats will be bi-level, allowing soils and moisture to drift below the surface, which limits the amount of contaminants and moisture that is “walked in” on the bottom of shoes.

A quality program also involves the use of three different matting systems, totaling about 15 feet in length. These include:

- A scraper mat placed outside to scrape larger particulates off shoe bottoms
- Scraper/wiper mats directly inside a facility to continue this cleaning process and absorb moisture
- Wiper mats placed in lobby areas to essentially finish the job of removing shoe bottom contaminants.

Working together, the three matting systems can trap as much as 80% of the soil on shoes. It should also be noted that this system can help significantly lower cleaning costs for worship facilities. ISSA (International Sanitary Supply Association—the largest cleaning association in the world) estimates that for every pound of soil entering a facility, it

costs about \$500 to remove it.

Green Floor Care Chemicals: Let the Trials Begin

There is a variety of Green certified floor care chemicals, finishes, and glosses now available from chemical manufacturers. However, and quite unfortunately, these products have lagged behind other Green chemicals in performance and cost. For instance, when the state of New York decided to Green floor care in government buildings, they tested 23 floor care finishes, but only found two that performed as well as conventional products used for many years. Similar outcomes were encountered when testing floor care strippers.

The problem with floor care products, specifically finishes, is that it has proven very difficult to replace many of the “metals” and other ingredients found in conventional products with Green, healthier substitutes. However, the fact that two of the 23 did work, indicates that it is possible and these products are available. In most cases, the best way to select the best Green floor care product for your worship facility is to run tests, just as they did in New York.

Certain products will work differently on various floor types.

If a satisfactory Green certified product fails to surface, look for conventional floor care products that have:

- A pH of higher than 11.5
 - Phosphorous concentrations of less than 0.5%
- A flash point above 150 degrees Fahrenheit (this the temperature at which a liquid will develop sufficient vapor to flash or ignite)
 - Total volatile organic compounds of less than 7%
 - No known carcinogens or aqueous ammonia.

In many cases, this information will be provided by the manufacturer or found on the product's Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). However, a knowledgeable distributor can prove invaluable when helping to select healthier floor care products.

Green Floor Care

Making sure your cleaning methods are not only good for your building, but for your staff and the environment as well

The Greening of carpet care usually entails using environmentally preferable cleaning chemicals and low moisture extractors. These machines use less water and chemical, yet still satisfactory clean carpets.

We are now realizing that essentially the same is true when it comes to Greening hard surface floor care. The less chemical and water the machine uses to be effective, the less impact it has and the healthier it is for the environment. However, in order to be successful, the machine must be able to clean deep into porous floors and grout areas and remove contaminants. It may require a different type of floor care technology to clean these troublesome and hard to reach areas.

Most floor machines are rotary and use pads to scrub, clean, and polish floors. Pads are limited in both their reach and their ability to remove embedded soils. In fact, because grout areas are typically lower than the floor's surface,

pads may not be able to reach these spots at all.

A different technology, such as cylindrical brush technology, helps alleviate this problem. These machines use counter-rotating brushes, instead of pads, allowing the removal of hard to reach soils. Additionally, because the brushes and the machine do most of the work, studies indicate this equipment uses as much as 30 percent less water and chemical, which is more environmentally responsible. Further, the brushes last much longer than rotary pads, reducing waste.

Getting Staff on the Green Floor Care Plan

Earlier it was mentioned that Greening a worship facility must start at the top. But, that also may mean that others, such as the facility's cleaning crew, must be convinced that Greening floor care is important. There may be some reluctance to change, especially with floor care since it is a difficult, labor intensive task.

However, the most convincing argument is to tell cleaning professionals that Greening floor care is much better for their health. In fact, the state of California now considers floor care so hazardous to health that the "slurry" generated when stripping and scrubbing floors must be placed in sealed containers and treated as hazardous waste.

Historically, the goal of floor maintenance has been appearance. But, Green floor care is all about protecting health and the environment. Fortunately, today's floor care technology is starting to make both of these goals relatively easy to accomplish.

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