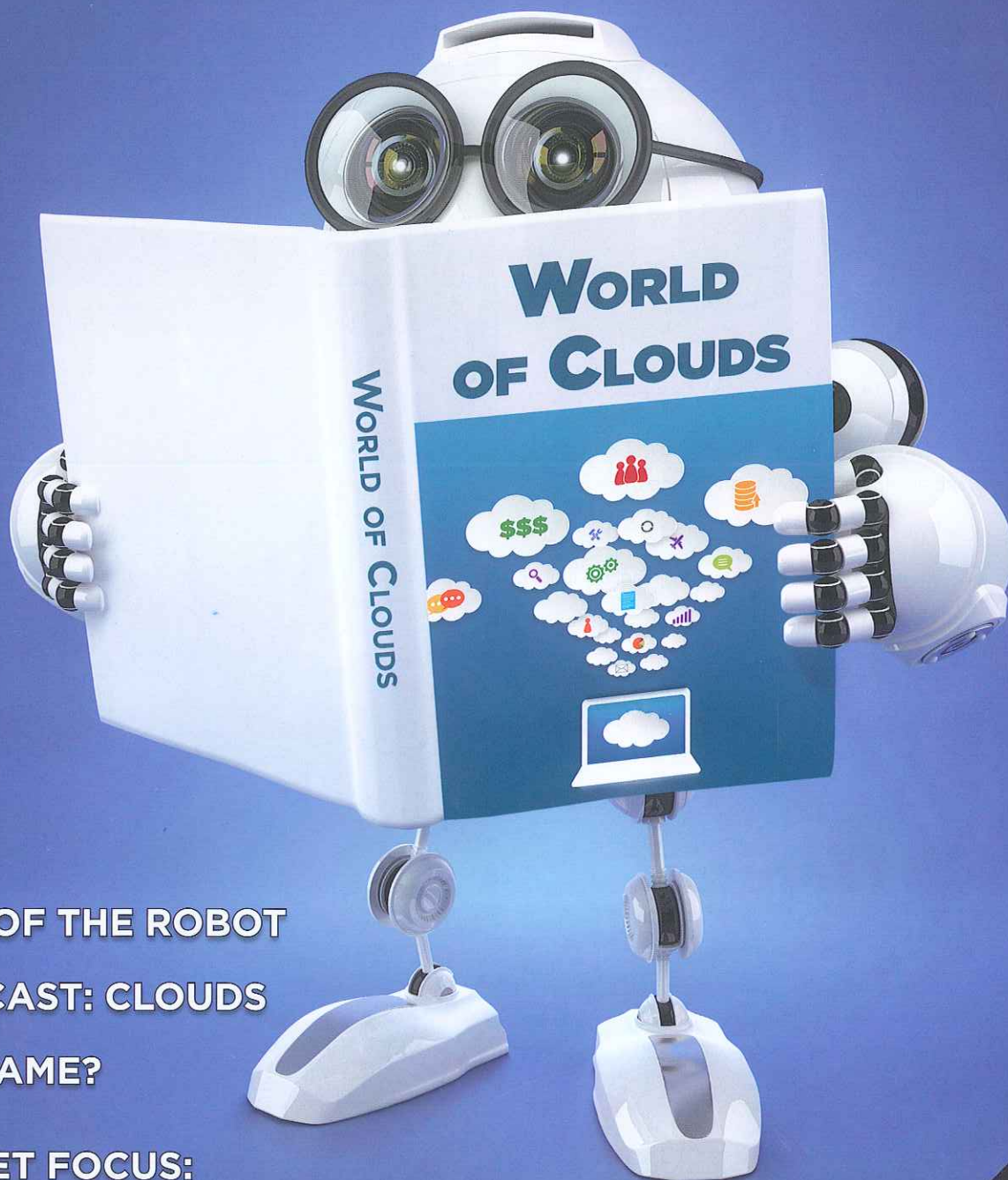




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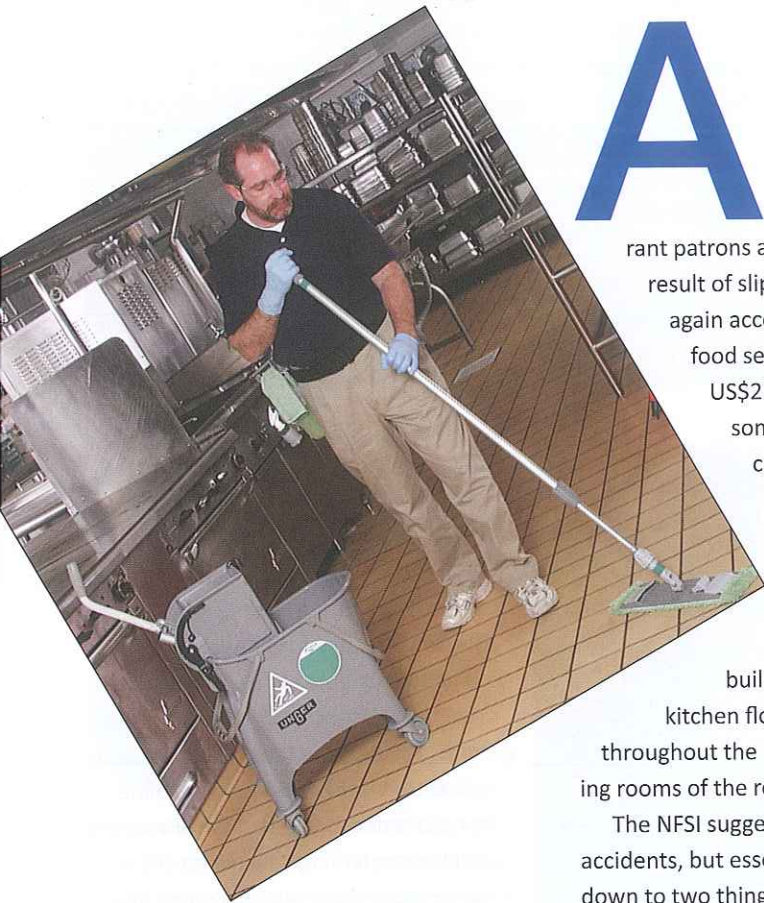
GOT GAME?

**MARKET FOCUS:
FLOOR CARE**

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Food Service Floor Care

By Sean Martschinke



According to the National Floor Safety Institute (NFSI), more than three million food service employees and more than one million restaurant patrons are injured each year as a result of slip-and-fall accidents. This, again according to NFSI, costs the food service industry more than US\$2 billion every year. While some of these accidents can be attributed to such things as tripping over a cord or missing a step on a walkway, a large percentage of them are due to grease buildup and wet soil on the kitchen floor, which can spread throughout the kitchen and into the dining rooms of the restaurant via foot traffic.

The NFSI suggests ways to reduce these accidents, but essentially, the advice comes down to two things: requiring staff to wear slip-resistant footwear and giving greater attention to floor maintenance. While janitor manufacturers, distributors, and cleaning service professionals can report the NFSI's findings to their food service clients and encourage them to have their staff wear slip-resistant footwear, it is through proper floor maintenance that we can play our most important role.

The Floor Audit

Although a manager's first inclination, especially if there has been an accident recently on a commercial kitchen floor, is often to jump in and select new cleaning chemicals, tools, methods, and equipment, this may turn out to be a costly mistake. Rather, a

more expedient option would be a careful analysis of the floor, performing what we can call a floor audit. The NFSI maintains that "auditing is a simple and highly effective means to prevent slip-and-fall accidents."

A typical floor audit evaluates the following essential information:

- How the floor is currently being used and maintained
- Where soiling is most prevalent (especially soiling such as oil and grease)
- Key traffic patterns of staff in the kitchen and into the dining room
- Any factors, relating to when slip-and-fall accidents are most likely to occur or when floor soiling is a bigger concern
- The type of floor installed and any irregularities (broken tiles, uneven tiles, etc.)
- If, where, and what types of floor mats are installed
- Current floor care methods as well as an inventory of all cleaning products used to maintain the floor
- Measurement of the floor's current slip resistance; this is performed by using a machine that measures the floor's static coefficient of friction (SCOF).

Note, a floor audit is not a one-time process. In fact, the NFSI recommends that "restaurant owners periodically audit their floors' slip-resistance." The reason for this is that, while an initial SCOF reading will provide a benchmark, general wear and other factors can change a floor's SCOF reading over time.

What We Can Do

With the floor audit completed, we can begin to implement the needed adjustments to keep our commercial kitchen floors cleaner and safer. One of the first steps involves proper matting. Based on

Did You Know?

- Falls are one of the leading causes of unintentional injuries in the United States, accounting for approximately 8.9 million visits to the emergency department annually (2011).

- Falls are the second-leading cause of unintentional death, resulting in more than 25,000 fatalities (2009) per year.

Source: National Safety Council

the audit's findings, place matting at strategic locations in and directly outside the kitchen, such as walkways leading into and out of the kitchen. The type of mats selected is also crucial. Although a more traditional cloth-like or fabric mat may serve well in dry walkways directly outside the kitchen to help capture soils and moisture, inside the kitchen, better options include drip-through or drainage mats that allow moisture, grease, and soils to filter below the walking surface, allowing the top of the mat to remain dry and debris-free. Additionally, anti-fatigue matting is advisable. Kitchen staff stand for long hours during the workday. As fatigue sets in, the risk of a slip-and-fall accident can increase.

There is little we can do about the type of floor installed in the kitchen, but we can make a difference in how it is cleaned. After a thorough sweeping, kitchen floors are typically mopped using cleaning agents and/or degreasers. If mopping, instead of using a traditional "spaghetti" mop, a microfiber mop is often recommended. A microfiber mop tends to be lighter than a spaghetti mop, making it easier to handle, but more important, the mop head can be easily replaced as it becomes soiled.

There are also mopping alternatives cleaning pros can consider. For example indoor spray or pressure washing systems, specifically designed for cleaning commercial kitchen floor, are often an effective option.

Automatic Scrubbers

Although the cleaning methods just discussed will typically work well in smaller kitchens or for daily cleaning, a high-volume commercial kitchen floor will likely need heavier-duty care, typically in the form of automatic scrubbers. In fact, to keep the floor clean and safe in a very busy location, scrubbers may need to be used every day or multiple times during the course of the day.

An automatic scrubber is designed to clean, agitate, loosen, and then vacuum up soils all in one process. Because of the type of soiling in a commercial kitchen—grease and oil in particular—and because many kitchen floors are tile and grout and porous, an automatic scrubber can prove very effective.

A typical restaurant kitchen will likely have steam tables, cutting islands, and other items that become obstacles when scrubbing the floor with a large automatic scrubber. Fortunately, there are now small-

"There is little we can do about the type of floor installed in the kitchen, but we can make a difference in how it is cleaned."

to medium-size machines that usually work well. In addition, a cordless system is highly recommended, as the elimination of the cord itself decreases the chances of a slip-and-fall accident. Further, some automatic scrubbers have eco-friendly batteries that are also safer than conventional batteries and require less maintenance.

When selecting an automatic scrubber, some characteristics to look for include:

- A parabolic squeegee system. When located directly behind the pad, this system tends to be more effective at capturing moisture, so the floor dries faster.
- A very maneuverable machine engineered to rotate as much as 180 degrees left or right. A commercial kitchen may have islands and other obstacles that can make scrubbing all the more difficult without this maneuverability.

- A machine that can be easily stored. Commercial kitchens rarely have enough storage so selecting a machine with collapsible handles, for instance, can make storage easier.

Training

No floor care program—or any other cleaning procedure—will prove effective without proper training. For multilocation or chain restaurants, it is often wise to have a "train-the-trainer" program. Training should include:

- Safety procedures
- How floors are to be maintained
- What equipment is to be used
- Operating the equipment
- Cleaning frequencies
- Other program-specific essentials.

It is also a good idea to train kitchen staff who may not be directly involved with cleaning and floor maintenance. The reason for this is that restaurants tend to have a very high turnover rate. For safety, hygiene, and health reasons, it is important that many people know how to properly clean the floors.

The training should include another component for all those working in a commercial kitchen, and that is a slip-and-fall prevention program. Wall charts, posters, and other signage help make staff aware of the measures they can take to prevent slips and falls and protect their own health and safety. ■



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