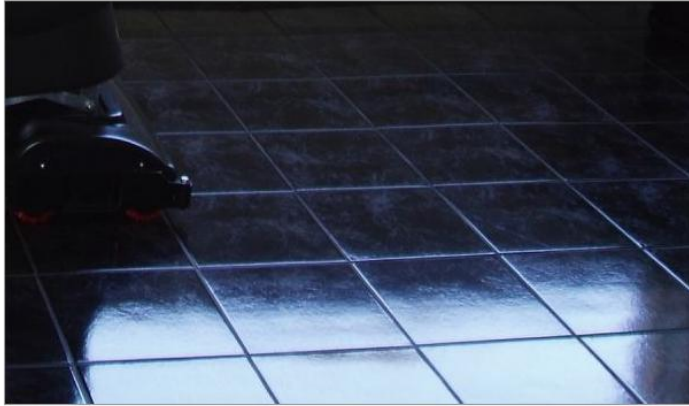


EDITORIAL

Grow your knowledge

[PRINT ARTICLE](#) [EMAIL ARTICLE](#)

Judgment Day for Church Floors

A must-read for facilities managers ... and all church leaders

by Daniel Frimmi Added January 16, 2013

Floors in all types of locations, including many church facilities, receive unrelenting foot traffic throughout the year. Because of this, a high-gloss shine can very quickly lose its luster. And when it does, the floor's appearance can and usually does reflect poorly on the facility and its management.

People consciously and subconsciously make up their minds about the cleanliness of a facility based on floor conditions. When visitors enter a facility and see floors that are dull and soiled, many start to think the entire facility is dirty. On the other hand, if the floors are clean and, especially if the floors have a high-gloss shine, many visitors will feel the property is cared for and well maintained.

Partnered with an ongoing floor care program, sealers and finishes, otherwise known as floor wax, typically help custodial workers produce a quality, durable shine. While sealers and finishes can put a high-gloss luster on a floor, the real purpose of these products is to provide protection. Sealers and finishes act as a floor's foundation, helping protect it from scratches and soils that can (in a worst case scenario) permanently damage the floor.

Traditionally, cleaning professionals would apply two coats of sealer on a floor before applying a finish. The sealer does not make floors shine. Instead, a sealer is designed, as its name implies, to fill and seal pores and grout areas to help prevent soil buildup and staining. However, today's floor finishes have advanced to the point where a sealer, in most cases, is no longer necessary. New, advanced floor finishes essentially do "double-duty"—they seal the floor and make it shine. (Editor's note: see sidebar below: "When a Sealer is Still Needed.")

The next consideration is usually the number of applications needed. If the finish makes a floor shine and if you are not using a sealer, how many coats of finish should be applied to a church floor? Believe it or not, this is one of the most debated issues in the professional cleaning industry. Some experts recommend as few as three coats, while others recommend as many as seven or eight. In my experience, a floor is protected and begins to shine once at least three thin coats of finish are applied. It is very important that each coat be a thin application. In most cases, four or five thin coats of finish are adequate.

However, there are exceptions. For church locations, the following areas should or may require five to seven coats for extra floor protection and to maintain a high-gloss shine:

- The main entrance lobby
- Key walkways off the main entrance
- All-purpose rooms that may be used for a variety of activities
- Any heavy-traffic walkway

One final note on using floor finishes: it is very important that each coat of finish dries and hardens before applying the next coat. Very often, the finish will be dry to the touch within 30 minutes to an hour. However, it may take three or four hours for the finish to harden. Once the finish hardens—a process that is sometimes called curing—it forms a tough, long-lasting coating. Only after each coat of finish hardens should the next coat be applied. (Editor's note: see sidebar below: "A Note on Finishes.")

To Scrub or to Strip?

While we want our floors to have a high-gloss shine, we have to face some hard realities when it comes to floor care. Refinishing floors can be messy, expensive, time consuming, disruptive to a facility's operation, and environmentally unfriendly. This is why most facilities try to stretch refinishing cycles as long as possible and do so by performing what are called scrub and recoats.

ecobee is Proven to Save You
More Time, Energy and Money



ENTER TO WIN

5 ecobee EMS thermostats for your facility!

Power and Punch

P-Series
Portable
Speaker
System

CERWIN-VEGA!
The LOUD Speaker Company

RELATED IMAGES



ENLARGE

A scrub and recoat typically moves along fairly quickly, is far less costly, and its impact on the environment is considerably lower.

Additionally, when scrubbing a floor, custodial workers do not need to scrub all areas of the floor. They can concentrate on the most trafficked areas, for instance lobbies or central aisles in walkways. This also speeds the process and reduces costs.

First, in order to perform any floor care task properly, cleaners need clarification on some common terms and their definitions. Stripping a floor requires the removal of all old floor finish, along with soil and contaminant buildups that have accumulated over several months or years. When this is completed, the floor is at its natural state.

Scrubbing typically refers to scrubbing clean the top level of the floor. In the process some finish will likely be removed, which is why scrubbing is followed with a re-coat—applying another coat of finish to the floor. This helps maintain the floor's luster.

A scrub and recoat typically moves along fairly quickly, are far less costly, and its impact on the environment is considerably lower. Additionally, when scrubbing a floor, custodial workers do not need to scrub all areas of the floor. They can concentrate on the most trafficked areas, for instance lobbies or center aisles in walkways. This also speeds the process and reduces costs.

A floor can only be scrubbed clean and recoated a certain number of times. In the past, floors were refinished two or three times per year. However, many facilities can scrub and recoat a floor every few months and delay refinishing it for a couple of years ... sometimes longer. Still, the floor will eventually need to be refinished. If it appears discolored, yellows, or the luster has faded after several months, a complete refinishing is likely necessary.

The Equipment Component

While finishes are designed to make a floor shine, do not forget the importance of floor care equipment for regular cleaning and maintenance as well as producing a high-luster shine. Whenever possible, church facilities should use automatic scrubbers to maintain their floors. These machines dramatically expedite the floor cleaning process and typically do a far better job of cleaning than can be done manually.

An automatic scrubber is designed to clean, rinse, and dry a floor all in one pass as it also restores the floor's finish. One problem with older scrubbers is that they are too large—and often very expensive—to use in many church locations. But in the past few years, a new generation of automatic scrubbers has been introduced that are compact, designed to work in smaller locations, more versatile, and less costly.

Look for systems that have features such as:

- Large solution tanks, about 14 gallons, improve worker productivity because the tank does not need to be emptied and filled as often
- Quiet operation since loud machines can cause worker fatigue
- An eco-friendly battery (the scrubber should be battery operated for greater flexibility)
- Ergonomically designed
- Manual adjustment of brush pressure to deep or light scrub floors

Some facility managers report great success with what are called cylindrical brush floor scrubbers. One benefit of these systems is that unlike a conventional scrubber, which uses pads, cylindrical machines use brushes that tend to be more effective at removing deeply embedded soils. Because the brushes do more of the work, less water and chemical is often needed, which can be both a cost savings and a plus for the environment.

In situations when using an automatic scrubber is not feasible, the floor must be cleaned using a mop. It is very important to use a clean mop, a clean bucket, and a neutral cleaner and to change the cleaning solution frequently. This procedure applies when using a string or microfiber mop head. Not only do soiled mop heads spread contaminants as they become soiled, but they can also negatively impact the floor's shine; the use of more powerful cleaning chemicals can also hinder the floor's appearance.

It's All in the Routine

If your goal is to have a high-gloss floor shine that welcomes visitors into your church, the proper use of sealers, finishes, and floor care equipment are all crucial. But having an ongoing floor maintenance program in place is equally vital. This plan includes: regular dust mopping or vacuuming; mopping or the use of an automatic scrubber; scrubbing on set schedules, or as needed; as well as a complete strip and refinish.

In closing, while it is a good idea to put floor scrubbing and recoats on a set schedule, this is not always beneficial for refinishing floors. The floor should be refinished when needed, as mentioned. This not only is a cost savings, but it is also an integral part of "green" floor care.

Sidebar #1: When a Sealer is Still Needed

A floor sealant is a polymer-based coating designed to protect vinyl and other types of hard surface floors. In some situations, it is still advised to apply a sealer to a floor before the finish. This is true for floors and situations such as: a very heavily trafficked floor; a floor that is heavily porous; an uneven floor, which might cause soils and contaminants to build up in pores, grout, crevices, etc.; an older floor that needs additional protection; and when managers are trying to delay floor refinishing cycles for prolonged periods of time to help reduce costs and the potential negative impact floor refinishing can have on the environment.

Sidebar #2: A Note on Finishes

Older floor finishes may contain an ingredient called styrene. While styrene does serve some valuable purposes, it is sensitive to ultraviolet light and, over time, can cause the floor to yellow or discolor. Many finishes are now styrene-free and may work better in a church facility.

Daniel Frimml is technical service coordinator for Tornado Industries, a manufacturer of professional cleaning equipment. He can be reached at www.tornadovac.com.