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A Winter Floor Care Survival Program

By Robert Kravitz

After experiencing one of the worst winters in recent memory, the last thing most building owners and industrial facility managers want to think about is winter. However, they have little choice. Winter will soon be here, and one of the things many building owners and managers learned from last year's experience is that they must prepare for and try to mitigate the havoc winter wreaks on facility floors.

Even the best floor care maintenance program will fall short if it doesn't adjust its protocol to specifically address winter conditions. Snow, rain, slush, and, possibly the worst offender, ice melt are all certainties in the winter months. And when countless numbers of individuals track these unwanted elements onto building floors via their shoes, this can not only mar the appearance of a floor but also damage it. And these contaminants can negatively affect the indoor environmental quality of the facility as well.

Even under "normal," non-winter conditions, ISSA (International Sanitary Supply Association), the largest cleaning association in the world, reports that up to 24 pounds of dirt can be tracked into a facility by just 1,000 people coming through an entrance over a 20-day work period. Not only is this a lot of soiling, but it's expensive for facilities as well. According to ISSA, the cost to remove just *1 pound* of dirt after it is tracked throughout a building can exceed $500. During the cruelest of winter months, the soiling is likely to occur

much more rapidly, making cleaning efforts much more expensive as well.

Facility managers, working with their jansan distributors, can develop a winter floor care program that helps protect floors, reduce cleaning needs, and produce a healthier and safer work environment. Key to a successful program is planning now, well ahead of winter's wrath.

Protecting Floors from the Outside In

Except when safety is an issue, during the winter months many facilities place outdoor maintenance on hold. This should not be the case, however, because the cleaner the outdoor areas surrounding a building--such as parking lots, walkways, and sidewalks--the easier it is to maintain the inside of the facility.

These outdoor areas should be of special concern because many roads and highways are covered with ice melt–type products. These products make their way into the facility parking areas on the vehicles of staff and visitors and then are walked on and carried into the facility. Although these products are designed to melt ice, as the name implies, and promote safety, they can seriously damage floors and carpets if tracked in on the shoe bottoms of building occupants.

Parking lot maintenance programs should be continued during the winter months wherever possible. Winter landscaping programs, designed to protect plants but also to keep soil, vegetation, and gravel off of walkways, will also help keep the insides of facilities clean. Additionally, regular cleaning, sweeping, and maintenance of immediate walkways around the facility should be *increased* during the winter months. Very often just the opposite occurs.

Defending the Facility

Exterior maintenance is preventative, since it helps prevent soils and contaminants that can harm floors and negatively affect indoor environmental quality from entering a building. And what a good exterior maintenance program needs is a line of defense, which usually involves a high-performance matting system.

"Matting systems are designed to stop contaminants at the front door," says Christopher Tricozzi, vice president of sales and marketing for Crown Mats and Matting, one of the oldest and largest matting manufacturers in North America. "However, not all matting systems are high-performance matting systems, nor are all matting systems equal in their ability to protect the indoor environment."

For instance, Tricozzi explains that rental mats are often of "fair" quality at best, and often these mats are of very limited size. Companies that rent these mats offer them in smaller sizes not because smaller mats are the most effective at preventing soils from entering a facility but because the smaller size makes it easier for delivery personnel to install and remove the mats.

To better understand the importance of high-performance matting and how it can be used to protect a facility, especially during the winter months, Tricozzi offers the following definitions and clarifications:

- A high-performance matting system refers to mats that are designed to last one year or more. Some very high-quality mats may have as much as a six-year warranty. Mats that are not high performing may have as little as a 90-day warranty.

- Scraper mats, the first line of defense, are placed outside the entrances to a facility. These should be at least five feet in length and are designed to scrape large debris and soil off shoes as the mats are walked on.

- Wiper/scraper mats come next and are placed just inside facility entrances. Also five feet or more in length, often these are placed in the vestibule or "air lock" area between double sets of doors. These remove remaining soils and help remove moisture as well.

- Wiper mats, the final line of defense, are placed next and are designed to remove any remaining contaminants and moisture from shoe bottoms. These are also a minimum of five feet.

"A high-performance matting system is a matting system that utilizes three different types of high-quality mats totaling about 15 feet in length," he says. "Many jansan distributors refer to the length of a high-performance matting system as the 'Rule of 15.' Some cleaning professionals, especially Green cleaning advocates, advise even more matting (20 to as much as 30 feet) be installed."

Winter Floor Maintenance

The cold winter months require cleaning professionals in many parts of the country to make significant changes in their floor care maintenance program, according to Michael Schaffer, president of Tornado Industries, a leading manufacturer of professional cleaning equipment. Schaffer suggests that when it comes to the cleaning and maintenance of industrial floors during the winter months, facility managers are advised to "keep it neutral" and to clean, scrub, and polish more often.

"A neutral floor cleaner should be used to keep floors clean of salt buildup which can cause damage to the floors," he says "Managers should not experiment with high or low pH cleaners during this time because they may interact with salt, ice melt, and other outdoor elements that may have been walked onto the floors and cause damage to the floors."

Also, the floors should be mopped more frequently, and if possible all cleaning should be performed using an automatic scrubber. "The machine can deep scrub the floors, removing embedded soils grit, and contaminants that can eat away at a floors finish," says Schaffer. "This helps delay or prevent expensive restorative [floor] maintenance."

Further, the improvement in worker productivity ☐ the ability to get more work done in less time ☐ is so significant by using an automatic floor machine, that Schaffer believes they are a "must have" in most industrial settings. "Studies continue to report," he says, "when used by a properly trained cleaned professional, an

autoscrubber can pay for itself within months *and* save money in the long run because it cleans floors so much more thoroughly."

Finished Floors

Although many industrial locations may have unfinished floors in their key work areas, finished flooring is often present in the lobbies and general office areas of a facility. These floors should be stripped and refinished *before* the cold winter months arrive. Many finishes do not dry and adhere to the floor properly during adverse winter months due to the cold, humidity, and other factors.

The best winter floor care program for finished floors is to autoscrub them, as mentioned earlier, and to burnish them frequently. "The burnishing further helps remove impurities that can become lodged on the top surface of the floors," adds Schaffer. "Burnishing prevents damage to the floors as it improves their appearance."

He also recommends selecting equipment with built-in vacuum systems. This helps capture and trap impurities in the burinishing process, helping to protect the health of the cleaning worker, building occupants, and the environment.

Winter floor care takes more time, attention, and planning than floor care in the non-winter months. By continuing outdoor maintenance, installing high-performance matting, and keeping floors clean, dry, and polished, most any facility should remain cleaner, healthier, and safer during the worst of winter.

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