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Cutting Floor Care Costs

By Robert Kravitz

The economic downturn has affected just about every business, including gyms and workout facilities. Along with implementing new and more aggressive



marketing programs, many gym owners are also taking a look at their expenses, trying to find areas where some cuts can be made.

Cleaning, which can be a costly expense for gym owners, is one of the first areas to come under scrutiny. However, gym owners must be careful because many members select a gym *based* on its cleanliness and appearance. Therefore, reducing the cleaning budget could have serious repercussions down the road, especially if the health and appearance of the facility begins to suffer.

When reviewing the cleaning-related expenses, instead of looking at the big cleaning picture, it might be better to break it up into components. For example, see how much time is spent vacuuming, mopping, dusting equipment, etc., and where cuts are possible. After such an evaluation, managers have a better idea of which areas need less attention and which areas need ongoing attention.

Therefore, ideally, cleaning workers can spend more time performing vital cleaning tasks, which may also enhance the appearance of the facility.

One possible cost-cutting area is floor care. In most gyms, proper mopping is a cleaning task that must be performed on a regular basis, sometimes multiple times per day in a busy facility. But, according to a 2004 report by Green Seal®, a leading Green certification organization, more than \$1 billion is spent annually in the U.S. for floor care products, such as strippers, sealers, cleaners used for deep-cleaning, and finishes used for polishing. This figure does not include the cost of labor, which can account for the majority of expenses to perform floor care tasks.

There are ways to reduce scrubbing, stripping, and refinishing cycles that are cost efficient and Green since floor care chemicals have been identified as some of the most harmful products on the market for users, building occupants, and the environment.

Soil Prevention Strategies

The first step in reducing floor care costs is prevention, such as developing ways to keep soils, moisture, and contaminants outside. The astute gym manager knows the best soil prevention strategy is matting, which is designed to collect dirt and moisture from shoe bottoms. What may not be as well known is that not all matting is alike. Additionally, the length of the matting is crucial: if too short, even the best matting system will not be as effective as it could be.

Many gym facilities turn to a rental service to provide matting. These services typically install and then remove soiled mats on a set schedule, which can be very convenient for gym managers. However, did you know many of these mats are typically designed more for the service's delivery person than the facility where they will be installed?

At a recent seminar in Chicago, the facility manager of a LEED-certified* government building said that rental matting systems are usually too small to be effective and are designed this way so they are easier for the delivery person to pick up the old mat and install the new one. This may make the delivery person's job easier, but does little to help keep facilities clean and healthy.

“What is more effective is a high-performance matting system that usually must be purchased from a distributor,” says Christopher Tricozzi, vice president of sales and marketing for Crown Mats and Matting. “The easiest way to spot a high-performance mat is by its warranty. Whereas a rental mat may only last a few months, a high-performance mat is typically guaranteed for one to several years.”

Along with the longer warranty, Tricozzi adds that high-performance mats are designed to scrape off soil and moisture from shoe bottoms and, this is the important part, trap them in the matting system, preventing contaminants from being tracked into the facility. “Some high-performance mats accomplish this because of their bi-level construction,” says Tricozzi. “As foot traffic passes over the mat, soil and

(moisture) fall below the upper surface of the matting where it is stored.”

As mentioned, length is vital when it comes to matting.

Tricozzi suggests that gym managers adhere to the “Rule of 15.” The Rule of 15 involves three matting types working as a system. These three mats include:

- **Scraper Mats:** Often referred to as the first line of defense, five feet of scraper matting is placed outside of a facility to scrape dirt, debris, and snow from shoe bottoms.
- **Wiper/Scraper Mats:** Also five feet, these are placed inside the gym and remove soils and moisture not trapped by the scraper mats.
- **Wiper Mats:** The final line of defense, these five-foot long mats prevent most all remaining contaminants from entering the facility.

Reading between the Dots

In many facilities, refinishing floors is performed on a set schedule. But, due to high labor costs associated with this work, floors should be refinished as needed and not before. One way—a very old way that still works well—involves placing colored dots, using a magic marker or similar device, in an inconspicuous area between coats of finish. For instance, placing a red dot after the second coat, a blue dot after the third coat, and a yellow dot after the fourth will help monitor how many coats of finish are still left on the floor over time and wear. The goal is to consider refinishing or applying a fresh coat of finish on the floor once the red or blue dots appear or become more apparent.

Advancements in floor care equipment have also helped reduce costs. “For instance, many automatic scrubbers today have solenoids to control water flow,” says Michael Schaffer, president of Tornado Industries, manufacturer of professional cleaning tools and equipment. “This provides better water control during operation, as well as avoiding the old problem of water accidentally flowing if an operator leaves the valve open”.

And another noteworthy advancement in floor care equipment, according to Schaffer, are advancements made on battery-powered machines. There have been

improvements in battery and other technology that allow the units to be smaller in size, while providing improved run times and performance. Since battery powered units do not have to be continually plugged in and unplugged from wall outlets, worker productivity increases considerably, plus the facility's Green image is enhanced through energy savings.

Finally, Schaffer suggests that gym managers with sport flooring (rubberized floors) look into an entirely different kind of floor care machines called cylindrical brush technology. Unlike conventional rotary machines, "these units use cylindrical brushes to clean and scrub floors," he says. "They can reach deep into the surface areas of rubberized sports floors and remove soiling with little or no added time or labor costs. Plus, cylindrical brush machines use less water and solution, producing safer floors that dry faster."

The Final Tip

Along with high-performance matting, dots, and more advanced floor care machines, another way gym managers can reduce maintenance costs is by spending *more* on cleaning chemicals. "This is one area where managers should not skimp," says Schaffer. "Selecting higher quality products usually pays dividends. [A high quality product]

lasts longer, is easier to apply, and is often safer. Spend a little more [now] to save a lot more later.”

Robert Kravitz is a former building service contractor and now a writer for the professional cleaning industry.

Sidebar:

Facts about Soiling and a Need for Matting

- 70 to 80 percent of floor-damaging soil is tracked in through building entrances from daily traffic.
- Tracked-in dirt damages all types of flooring — carpet, tile, wood, etc. — and creates dust.
- Unprotected entrance flooring can accumulate up to two pounds of dirt per square yard — more can build up in inclement weather.
- It can cost, at a minimum, \$750 to remove one pound of dirt from a facility.

- Dirty, wet, and slippery floors are hazardous and present a poor image for a building and its occupants.

* Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design