

NEWSLETTERS

WHAT'S NEW

NEWS & SURVEYS

FEATURES

Magazines ■

How To  
Sustainability  
Best Practices  
Benchmarking  
White Papers  
Case Studies  
Special Reports

RESOURCES

Organizations  
Links  
MSDS Sheets

EVENTS & SEMINARS

Calendar of Events  
Education & Training

MARKETPLACE

Platinum Sponsors  
FM Directory ■  
Sustainability Specialists  
Special Offers

FM FORUM

SPECIAL TOPIC:

Communication in the Workplace

ADVERTISE ON FM LINK

Media Planner  
Marketplace  
Directory Sign-up  
Sustainability Specialist Sign-up

SEND US PRESS RELEASES

CONTACT US

HOME PAGE

## The Durable, Superior and Efficient Kühl



FRIEDRICH

LEARN MORE ▶

Facilities Management Magazine: FMJ [\[Contact FMJ\]](#)

FACILITY MANAGEMENT JOURNAL (IFMA)

# FMJ

WWW.FMJONLINE.COM

FMJ, the official publication of the International Facility Management Association (IFMA), is published bimonthly and provided in print and electronic editions to IFMA's more than 19,000 members, as well as to additional nonmember subscribers. To view abstracts and articles not shown here, it is necessary to either subscribe or order individual issues. You may subscribe online anytime at [www.fmjonline.com](http://www.fmjonline.com).

## Green Alternatives to Your Average Flooring

Gary Palphrey

When it comes to operating a facility in a more sustainable manner, managers typically think first about installing more energy efficient lighting and finding ways to reduce the amount of energy required to heat and cool their buildings. Next they consider the landscaping and restroom fixtures and make any necessary adjustments to conserve water. Then they typically investigate transferring to green cleaning products—a simple way to become more sustainable. In fact, they look just about everywhere...except the floors.

One reason for this oversight in many existing buildings is the floors already have been installed. A commercial carpet is designed to last about 10 years before it needs replacing. But in most cases, hard-surface floors can last for decades.

However, for buildings now being planned or constructed or for an existing facility under renovation, designers, building owners and managers have the opportunity to select from a variety of sustainable flooring options that are proving to be cost effective, high performing, relatively easy to maintain and attractive.

### What is a sustainable floor?

One way to define a sustainable hard-surface floor is to list its attributes. Sustainable floors generally encompass these characteristics:

- It is durable and high performing, lasting as long, if not longer, than the conventional floor it is designed to replace;
- The flooring materials are locally available, reducing transport costs;
- If it's a wood floor, it is made from wood species that are readily available and originate from managed forests (see sidebar);
- The flooring is recyclable and, possibly even more important, made from recycled materials; and
- It can be cleaned and maintained using readily available cleaning products made from sustainable ingredients.

As referenced earlier, several types of floors now meet these criteria. Bamboo and cork are becoming more and more popular in both residential and commercial settings, and even traditional hardwood species—such as red and white oak, maple, cherry, and walnut—now are being grown in managed forests.

In addition to wood, one flooring material that deserves considerable attention is rubber. To the surprise of many, rubber flooring is growing in popularity in all kinds of facilities. Not only can it be created from recycled tires, helping to



alleviate a major landfill problem, but it is available in just about any color.

## Wood flooring

Before discussing bamboo and cork flooring, note that bamboo is not made from a tree. It is actually a grass that through processing is formed into flooring that often is referred to as wood.

Bamboo grows all over the world but is more commonly found in Southeast Asia, especially China. It has the warm tone of traditional wood flooring, which has made it very popular in residential and commercial settings, and it is durable and resistant to wear. According to some reports, it has the same durability as some of the hardest of hardwoods traditionally used for flooring.



Cork oak trees grow mostly in the Mediterranean in such countries as Portugal, Algeria, Spain, Morocco, France, Italy and Tunisia. Although not as durable as bamboo, cork has some very unusual qualities such as being water, fire, rot and termite resistant. Cork flooring also has a sponge-like feel when walked on that can help reduce fatigue.

## Rubber flooring

Rubber flooring usually is made from recycled tires. Although tire manufacturers continually are changing how tires are made, they typically contain 65 percent rubber, 10 percent fiber and 25 percent steel by weight. Through a grinding, shredding, magnetic separating, screening and sorting process, these ingredients can be transformed into extremely durable and attractive flooring.

Rubber which often is referred to as protective flooring due to its considerable durability was used for flooring long before the popularity of recycling tires took hold. However, it was rarely a facility builder or manager's first choice. This is mostly due to its traditional utilitarian look and lack of style. In the past, most designers readily have used it in back-of-the-house locations such as staircases, warehouses, dock areas and in industrial areas where a protective, extremely durable floor is necessary. Now that rubber comes in a variety of colors, textures and designs, it is moving into the more visited areas of a facility.

The benefits of rubber are many. When compared to most conventional floor coverings, rubber flooring is an inexpensive alternative, making it a value solution. It is extremely durable and tends to be slip resistant, thereby promoting safety, and for those facilities seeking LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification, can help a facility earn points.

## Maintenance issues

When it comes to cleaning and maintenance issues regarding any type of flooring, it is always best to consult an expert. Sustainable wood floors have most of the same maintenance needs as conventional floors. However, one thing is very important.

In most cases, they should never be damp mopped. Over time, this can harm the floor. Instead they should be vacuumed, preferably with a backpack vacuum cleaner and/or dry mopped.

Vacuuming removes large and small particulates from the floor, while dry mopping will remove dust, according to Pelphrey. When a more thorough cleaning is necessary, ask the manufacturer, distributor or installer for recommendations on what products to use.

Scratches on the surface of the floor can be another issue. Unfortunately just as with traditional hardwood floors there is no such thing as a totally scratch-proof floor.

Vacuuming and sweeping the floor regularly, along with installing ample matting at building entries and on the floor itself in heavily trafficked areas, will help minimize scratching.

The following are suggestions for cleaning and maintaining most types of rubber floors:

- **Vacuum** - Although rubber floors can be swept and dust mopped, vacuuming these floors with a backpack vacuum cleaner is more thorough and environmentally preferable. Sweeping can mar indoor air quality and negatively impact the health of the cleaning professional. It is also more time consuming than vacuuming with a backpack.
- **Mop selection** - Although flat mops have become more popular in the professional cleaning industry and tend to use less water and chemicals than string mops, for a rubber floor, a string mop may be preferable. This is because many rubber floors have a textured, studded finish that can be difficult to clean using a flat mop system.
- **Chemical selection** - In most cases, a neutral cleaner is all that is necessary to clean rubber floors, and there



are several available that are green certified. However, if the floor is installed in a locker room, health care center or where there are increased concerns about germs and bacteria, a sanitizer or disinfectant often can be used.

Rubber floors also can be machine buffed for added luster. However, some problems may develop if the rubber floor is studded or has indentations. This texture can trap dirt and soils below the surface of the floor. A conventional rotary machine with a pad may not be able to penetrate the floor and remove this grit.

Instead, cleaning professionals often turn to what are called multiwash machines. The benefit of these machines is the fact that they use cylindrical brushes instead of rotary floor brushes or pads, which allows them to penetrate areas below the surface of the floor.

These machines can wash, scrub, mop and dry the floor in one step. This helps improve worker productivity and lower cleaning costs.

### Being practical about sustainability

There are other types of sustainable hard-surface floors that have not been mentioned here. These often are made from recycled materials such as glass, tile, cement and other products. Very often, sustainable floors also are made of combinations of materials. Nevertheless, nearly all types are considered highly durable and with the attention they are receiving from designers, have become quite attractive as well.

Building owners and managers now have scores of ways to make their buildings more sustainable. Whether it involves heating, air conditioning, water or flooring, more practical sustainable options are available that in most cases are surprisingly cost effective and help protect valuable resources for future generations. FMJ



*Gary Palphrey is the marketing director for Pow-Filte, a leading manufacturer of floor care equipment. Palphrey may be reached via [www.powfilte.com](http://www.powfilte.com).*

FMJ, the official publication of the International Facility Management Association (IFMA), provides relevant coverage of worldwide industry trends that impact today's facility management professionals. Articles submitted to FMJ become the exclusive property of IFMA upon publication and are subject to all applicable copyright provisions. Questions regarding permission to reprint, reproduce or use FMJ material should be directed to the editor.

IFMA is the world's largest and most widely recognized international association for professional facility managers, supporting more than 19,000 members in 60 countries. The association's members, represented in 125 chapters and 15 councils worldwide, manage more than 37 billion square feet of property and annually purchase more than US\$100 billion in products and services. Formed in 1980, IFMA certifies facility managers, conducts research, provides educational programs, recognizes facility management degree and certificate programs and produces World Workplace, the world's largest facility management conference and exposition. For more information, visit [www.ifma.org](http://www.ifma.org).

#### Most Popular Related News Stories:

- The Facility Manager's Role in Real Estate Management
- What's in a Label
- A Checklist for Meeting Green Goals
- AFE and the Revolution in Building Operations and Maintenance
- UL Environment to help building products qualify for new LEED pilot credit

#### Related Topics:

- Building Systems
- Carpeting
- Energy Management

[Scroll to Top](#) [More articles from FMJ](#) [Visit Web Site of FMJ](#)