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Getting Realistic About Floor Care by Working Backwards

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Churches, just like most other types of facilities, want to provide a clean and healthy facility for their members and visitors. And one of the first and most important ways they accomplish this is with their floors.

Most Canadian churches are designed with hard-surface flooring at all major building entries. A clean, glossy and well-maintained floor acts as a welcome sign, inviting visitors into the church facility. And, having a sharp-looking floor can help make a positive first impression with visitors.

However, as important as floors are to the health and appearance of a church or any facility, some cleaning experts believe that floor care is on the decline in certain parts of Canada and the United States, including church facilities.

“I have even heard this as well,” said Mark Cuddy, a regional sales manager with Tornado, manufacturers of professional cleaning tools and equipment. “Interestingly, we see this happening at the same time that some of the most innovative floor care products, chemicals and equipment, like cylindrical brush floor machines, are available.”

So why is this happening? Cuddy and others believe it is because of one reason: cost. As building service contractors (BSCs) know, in some facilities, as much as 90 per cent of the cost of floor care is not the chemicals, equipment or supplies used but instead labour. Of all cleaning duties, cleaning, stripping, scrubbing and refinishing floors are the most labour-intensive and costly in the industry.

However, BSCs and church administrators can help reduce the costs of floor care and keep their floors

in tip-top condition by doing two things: taking a “big picture” approach to their floor and working backwards – firstly, determining their church’s floor care goals.

Look At The Big Picture

Just like any other organization, church facilities have budgets. Usually, building operations, including cleaning and maintenance, are included in the budgets and annual appropriations in most midsize and larger churches. But often the cleaning and maintenance budget is not broken down into items as specific as, for example, the amount of time – and money – the church wants to devote to hard-surface floor care.

This is a mistake for a variety of reasons and BSCs should encourage their church clients to re-evaluate their funding for floor care maintenance. For one, the amount of money allotted for cleaning and maintenance of the church may cover just daily maintenance operations, with little left over for larger and more costly cleaning projects like floor care. When floors begin to lose their lustre – and church officials discover how much it will cost to refinish the floors – the task is often placed on hold because of a lack of funds.

Additionally, floor care involves not only cleaning and maintenance of the floor but protection as well. This is especially true of tile floors or floors with grout areas, which are often porous. The finish applied to a floor actually helps prevent soils and contaminants from penetrating the floor. Without this protection, the soil can penetrate the surface and weaken the glue or cement holding the tile to the floor, resulting in a loosened tile and a possible slip or fall. Furthermore, the grout areas grow darker as the soil builds, marring the appearance of the floor and making it much harder to restore the floor to a clean and glossy finish.

To avoid these and other problems, BSCs and church administrators must take a big picture approach to floor care. This means they must:

- Determine, on an annual basis, just how much time, effort and money will be invested in the church’s floor care.
- Evaluate the cost and productivity effectiveness of floor care products, and equipment currently available in the marketplace.
- Develop an effective and ongoing floor care cleaning, maintenance and protection program.

Working Backwards – First

Viewing the big picture for floor care is actually a component of working backwards first. In many cases, churches and other facilities play a wait-and-see game when it comes to floor maintenance. They wait to see how the floors look after weeks or months of use and then, when necessary, scramble to make improvements (if they have the funds) to restore the floor’s appearance as quickly as possible.

Working backwards first by establishing goals for floor care prevents this because it helps churches effectively maintain their floors on a consistent basis and in a cost-effective manner. Along with establishing a floor care budget, Cuddy advises BSCs to help their church clients set floor care goals such as:

- Determine the appearance level wanted for the floors.
- Evaluate traffic conditions affecting the floors.
- Determine if the floor equipment currently used is the most effective in reducing time and labour costs.
- Establish how much skill and training should be provided to the cleaning staff.

In many cases, this is just the opposite of how churches currently maintain their floors. Now, under current circumstances, when floor care problems develop, decisions must be made in a hurried fashion, which can often lead to more problems. Working backwards first, along with taking the big picture approach discussed earlier, helps keep this from happening.

“What this all boils down to is that many facilities, including churches, fail to view their floors as a

building asset,” Cuddy said. “They fail to realize how big a role floors play in the overall impression of the church, and how much they contribute to the health and safety of the staff and visitors.”

Improving Worker Productivity

As mentioned earlier, often the key deterrent to maintaining floors in top-notch condition is the cost of labour. According to Cuddy, there is only one way to reduce these costs and that is to “dollarize” floor care maintenance by calculating the cost of the floor care equipment used, and the associated labour costs.

For instance, a mop and bucket may cost only about \$40 to purchase, but studies show it can take one cleaning professional about four hours to clean a floor area of approximately 2000 sq. feet using this method. If the cleaning worker is paid \$10 per hour and the floor is cleaned 100 times per year, the actual cost to maintain the floor is about \$4000 annually.

Replacing the \$40 mop and bucket with a floor machine or autoscrubber that can cost \$3000 may seem like a big cost jump, “however, the annual cost savings are even more dramatic,” Cuddy said. “This is because the floor machine can clean the same area in less than an hour, reducing labour costs significantly.”

Using the previous example at the same cleaning frequency and same cost of labour, the annual floor costs using a floor machine would be approximately \$1000, possibly less. This represents a 75 per cent drop in labour costs, all due to increased worker productivity which allows cleaning workers to take on other cleaning tasks or church duties. This can even reduce the number of workers necessary to maintain the location overall.

Penny Wise But Pound Foolish?

Many facilities, not just churches, focus on the initial cost of floor care equipment instead of the long-term return on investment, according to Cuddy. “This is a perfect example of the old expression ‘penny wise but pound foolish’,” he said.

Instead, he advises churches to take a business approach when it comes to floor care. Making decisions that are cost-effective and rational can help them avoid, or at least handle more effectively, emergencies and keep floors looking their best year-round.

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