



# The Link

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## Goodbye Carpets...Hello Hard Surface Floors

By Kyle McCabe

Fifty years ago, most public and private schools, offices, government buildings, and healthcare facilities featured VCT or terrazzo floors. There were several reasons why many of these facilities, which changed their style less frequently compared to today's buildings, chose these types of hard surface floors. These facilities required durability and longevity, and hard surface flooring proved to be a long-term cost savings.

In the 1960s, carpeting became the vogue and these same types of facilities installed it over just about every hard surface floor area. Carpet became so popular in the residential setting that it was not uncommon for bathrooms and even kitchens to be carpeted as well.

However, building planners and designers ignored two core problems with carpet: it can be more challenging to keep clean compared with hard surface flooring and it does not last nearly as long. In most commercial settings, facility administrators can only hope that their carpets will last five to seven years before needing replacement.

Today, although carpet is still quite popular in many commercial settings, hard surface flooring is increasingly the floor of choice among facility managers. In fact, the demand for VCT, terrazzo, resilient, hardwood, and "architectural" finishes in public facilities has increased by about 15 percent in the past three years.

Therefore, many cleaning professionals now require ongoing, in-depth training on floor care to adequately maintain hard floor surfaces and stay abreast of new trends and developments in floor care technology. The expense of labor is one of the few drawbacks in effective hard surface maintenance. Since 90 percent of overall costs are associated with labor, a skilled technician using productive equipment can reduce expenses and still provide top-notch service.

### Developing Floor Care Skills

The best approach when training cleaning workers on floor care maintenance is through hands-on demonstrations. First, the trainer must review with workers the importance of effective floor care – including the simplest of procedures, such as how to maintain floors on a daily basis by dust/damp mopping or vacuuming, and in time, more complicated floor care tasks, such as how to strip, clean and refinish a floor.

Once these instructions are complete, the next step is detailing the intricacies and components of effective floor maintenance. It is also important to address – and end – old, ineffective floor maintenance habits the cleaning worker may have learned. As a result of modern hard surface floors, equipment, chemicals, and technologies, the way floor care is performed today is not necessarily the way it was done 10 or 15 years ago.

After these steps of the training program, the worker can start performing the actual floor care work. This is not a one-time procedure and may require working with

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cleaning workers several times over many weeks to ensure the tasks are performed as trained.

The final component can be considered the test. This is when the cleaning technician is evaluated on the floor maintenance duties he or she performed. As with all tests, this is an opportunity to see what skills have been learned and which practices may need more training and attention.

### **Proper Equipment Selection**

Overall, today's floor care equipment is simpler and easier to use and repair, and downtimes are becoming less frequent. Additionally, floor machines are becoming "healthier," with shrouds and vacuum systems that help protect indoor air quality and the health of the cleaning worker as well as building occupants. Also, some machines, such as cylindrical brush equipment, use less water and chemicals compared with conventional machines, which makes them environmentally preferable as well.

One key reason why floor care costs are high, especially when it comes to refinishing floors, is because the wrong size floor machines are selected. Floor care equipment should always be viewed as an *investment* and not an expense. "Sticker shock" on the showroom floor causes cleaning professionals and facility managers to select smaller, less expensive equipment or even turn to mops and buckets. But larger machines can perform most floor care tasks in dramatically less time, and the savings in labor can pay for these machines in a relatively short time – usually in just a few months.

Another way to reduce the expense to maintain floors is to consider different floor care technologies, such as cylindrical brush floor machines. These machines have counter-rotating brushes at each end of a square base. The brushes have greater contact pressure on the floor than a comparable rotary machine, and because the base is square, it can line up against baseboards and corners. This feature eliminates the need to clean hard-to-reach areas by hand – a labor savings that quickly becomes a major cost savings as well.

Cylindrical machines, which were originally only found in Europe, are now available in the United States. And, as is often the case with new products, other benefits have been discovered over time. One of the most significant benefits is that these machines are easier to use. Unlike rotary machines, which can be difficult to operate and require considerable floor care training, cylindrical machines "glide" over the floor surface. This helps improve worker productivity, reduce fatigue, and prevent injury, which also lowers labor costs.

Trends in cleaning and maintenance are often determined by the customer. For instance, Green cleaning has become a very significant trend in the professional cleaning industry due to customer demand, and the same is true with floor care. Because building planners, developers, and managers now find hard surface flooring more appropriate for their facilities, the cleaning industry has to follow their lead. This has forced the industry to focus training efforts on the most effective ways to perform floor care tasks and develop more productive, durable, and easy-to-use floor care equipment.

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