

# Responsible Floor Care

Steer clear of harsh cleaning products with the following tips

By Marianne Wilson

Increasingly, retail-facility managers are looking to go green with regard to store maintenance. A big area of concern is floor care—the most powerful and harshest chemicals used in cleaning are found in some floor-care products.

“Green floor care involves incorporating soil-prevention measures and using more advanced floor-care equipment as well as environmentally preferable chemicals. It also involves developing practices that help minimize refinishing cycles, so that less restorative work is necessary to keep floors clean and shiny,” said Kyle McCabe, an engineer with Tornado, St. Louis, manufacturer of professional floor and carpet-cleaning equipment.

According to McCabe, a green floor-care program should incorporate the following components:

**Matting systems:** High-performance matting systems are the first line of defense in a green floor-care program. The mats should be placed at all store entrances and cleaned regularly.

“As much as 15 ft. of matting, inside and outside the entry, is usually necessary for the matting system to perform efficiently,” McCabe said.

**Vacuuming:** Floors should be vacuumed instead of dust mopped or swept, as some cleaning experts believe the two latter practices generate as much dust as they remove.

Ride-on equipment that vacuums floors is now being used in many large stores and other facilities. Additionally, HEPA (high-efficiency particulate arrestance) backpacks, which prevent any impurities from escaping the casing of the machine, are now being introduced and can be used on both carpeted and hard-surface floors. These new generation

backpacks are much lighter, more ergonomic and considered more environmentally sensitive than older machines and are effective at removing dust and contaminants while protecting indoor air quality.

**Floor-care equipment:** A newer option to consider is “clean-air” floor equipment (machines that use their motor to rotate the pad and also vacuum up dust before it can become airborne, thereby trapping the dust in the filtering system).

McCabe added that some retail stores are also selecting cylindrical floor machines because of their green attributes. These machines have rotating brushes that rotate inward, minimizing the amount of dust that can become airborne.

“They also tend to use less chemicals and water, making them more environmentally responsible,” McCabe said.

**Floor-care chemicals:** Selecting floor-care products that are environmentally preferable or have a reduced impact on

the environment is essential to a green floor-care program, said Mike Sawchuk, VP and general manager, Enviro-Solutions, Peterborough, Ontario, manufacturer of green cleaning chemicals.

Certification by such organizations as Green Seal can steer retailers on the right path. But even retailers that choose to continue to work with conventional products, Sawchuk said, can do their part in helping the environment by trying to avoid products that contain the following:

- Known carcinogens or reproductive toxins;
- Zinc or other heavy metals (zinc is often used in floor finishes that have a “wet look” appearance after burnishing);
- More than 7% volatile organic compounds (VOC) after dilution;
- Aqueous ammonia, ethylene glycol monomethyl ether (EGME), or ethylene glycol monoethyl ether (EGEE);
- A total phosphorous concentration of more than 0.5%;
- 2-butoxy ethanol (common in many conventional strippers); and
- A pH of 11.5 or higher.

Other green floor-care components include selecting chemicals that are designed to enhance productivity, such as more effective strippers that do not need to be applied twice to be neutralized. Sawchuk also recommends avoiding over- or under-diluting floor-care chemicals and using cold water when applying strippers.

**Minimizing refinishing cycles:** Develop a maintenance program that helps extend the high-gloss appearance of floors for a longer period of time, thereby minimizing refinishing cycles (refinishing is considered one of the most environmentally harmful aspects of floor maintenance). ■

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## Greenspeak

In much the same way it is used to describe building products, “green” is used to describe cleaning products designed and manufactured with minimal impact to the environment. Compared to similar conventional products, green products have a significantly reduced impact on human health and the environment, and emphasize conservation of resources, energy efficiency and healthful interior spaces.

Green cleaning features environmentally preferable cleaning products and equipment. Green cleaning products can include such practices as the avoidance of harsh cleaning solvents, water conservation and the use of energy-efficient motors.