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## Cleaning the Path More Taken

By Robert Kravitz — posted 01/21/2010



With time, the carpets in most high-traffic facilities will need to be cleaned, not only to protect the appearance and durability

of the carpet but also to safeguard the health of the facilities and the people who use them.

### Traffic-Lane Soiling

Observant facility managers and cleaning professionals know that soil patterns develop on carpeting. Certain areas of a carpet tend to become more soiled at a more rapid pace than other areas. This is especially true in hallways, where the center section of the carpeting becomes darker due to soiling while the outer edges may look essentially brand-new. This is referred to as traffic-lane soiling.

Often the center areas of a carpet become so soiled that facility managers find it necessary to replace the entire carpet. This is especially true if the soil has worked its way deep into the carpet fibers. When this happens, the carpet will begin to show serious wear and replacement may be the only option.

When only the center area of a carpet is soiled, however, it seems like a costly waste to replace it entirely. This unnecessary expense can be avoided if cleaning professionals understand why this soil pattern is occurring and then take steps to prevent it.

### The Root of the Problem

Carpet soiling can happen just about anywhere; however, in hallways and other thoroughfare-type areas, the problem intensifies simply due to the amount of foot traffic. The soil deposited on the carpeted pathways is made up of water-

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soluble substances such as “gray” moisture, which collects on shoes, as well as food and drink spills. Solvent-soluble soils, such as grease, oil, or tar, can collect on shoe bottoms as well, and these can then be transported onto carpeted areas, especially when those areas are near building entries. Dust, sand, grit, and clay from both inside and outside a facility can also gather on shoe bottoms, and then become pounded into the pathway as building occupants walk on the carpets.

Cleaning professionals often attempt to minimize carpet soiling by using various carpet spotters and chemicals. Although this may remove some stains, and can help prevent others from materializing, the use of such treatments is often only minimally effective. Why? Carpet soiling is typically made up of a wide variety of materials. Some of these materials may be oil-based, while others are water-based. Additionally, sand and grit get pounded into carpet fibers and mix with the oil- and water-based soils. Spotters that remove water-based stains may not be effective at removing oil-based spots. Mixed together with sand and grit, these different types of soils can be very difficult for cleaning technicians to remove.

Because dirt attracts dirt, once the problem of carpet staining begins it can grow considerably. Soil and contaminants act like a magnet as they penetrate carpet fibers, attracting even more soiling.

### Preventive Strategies

There are steps managers and cleaning professionals can take to help minimize traffic-lane soiling. The most significant one is prevention—that is, keeping the soils and contaminants from entering the facility in the first place.

“It all starts with catching the big stuff,” says Christopher Tricozzi, vice president-sales and marketing for Crown Mats and Matting, the oldest matting manufacturer in the United States. “This means that we have at least five feet of ‘scraper matting’ outside all building entries to scrape off larger debris from shoe bottoms.”

Inside a building’s door, says Tricozzi, five feet of scraper/wiper matting systems are needed. These capture whatever grit is still to be found on shoes and also help collect moisture from shoe bottoms. A high-performance matting system may hold up to one-and-a-half gallons of water per square yard. “Many of these [high-performance] matting systems are designed with bi-level construction. Soils and moisture collect underneath the surface of the mat so that they can not become reattached to shoe bottoms.”

The final line of defense is the plac  
Wiper mats capture and trap the r  
shoes after they pass over the oth

“These mats are referred to as hig  
effective and are a much higher qu  
often reflected in their warrantee,  
may only have a 90-day warrantee  
may have a warrantee of one or m  
cost savings as well.”

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### Removing Traffic-lane Soiling



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The most effective way to remove the deeply embedded soils at the root of traffic-lane soiling is through hot water extraction. Interim carpet cleaning systems—such as shampoo and bonnet systems, and even encapsulation, which is similar to the dry method of carpet cleaning—can help eliminate surface-level soiling to a point. But eventually, carpets need to be cleaned via hot-water extraction.

Carpet-cleaning methods, including the extractors now employed, have changed in recent years. For instance, instead of filling the solution tank with chemical cleaners and water, many technicians now pre-spray soiled areas, including pathways, with chemicals and detergents. The cleaner is permitted to sit on the carpet, allowing it to begin dissolving pathway soils and contaminants, which makes them easier to remove. Additionally, this technique tends to use a smaller amount of chemicals, making it more environmentally responsible. However, if the soiling is very heavy, this pre-spray process may need to be repeated.

“The extractor combines solution flow, pressure, agitation, and recovery,” says Steve Hanig, vice president-sales for U.S. Products. “It allows the water/solution to get deep enough into the carpet’s fibers to dissolve, loosen, and help remove the soil and other contaminants, but not so deep that it can cause damage to carpet.”

According to Hanig, because large machines can be difficult to move through a multi-floor facility, cleaning professionals should select portable carpet-cleaning extractors with variable pounds of force per square inch—or PSI—of up to 500. These machines are not only powerful and effective but also easy to maneuver and transport. “One way to determine how effective the extractor is, is to see if the equipment has been independently tested and awarded the ‘Seal of Approval’ by the Carpet and Rug Institute,” says Hanig.

In some cases, if traffic-lane soiling is excessive, the carpet may need to be shampooed first and then cleaned using a hot water extractor. However, according to Hanig, the more powerful and effective the extractor, the less likely it is that this will be necessary.

“Additionally, recently new laminar wand technologies have been introduced that help improve the airflow through the wand significantly, helping to remove pathway soils,” adds Hanig. “The airflow is more streamlined as it travels through the wand. This helps improve moisture and soil recovery significantly.”

Carpet-cleaning technicians should effective carpet cleaning—especially more than 100 years indicate that chemicals. The combination of heat residues, which are common in traffic carpet manufacturers recommend hot water extraction equipment, in order to maintain the carpet’s wear

### Not Just Clean, But Also Health

The preventive strategies discussed and should be incorporated in all f

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cleaning professionals are advised to treat traffic-lane soiling when it occurs quickly and decisively by using hot water extraction methods. Not only does this help improve the appearance of a facility and lengthen the lifespan of the carpet, but recent studies presented at the Cleaning Industry Research Institute—or CIRI—symposium at the University of Maryland indicate that not using these cleaning methods can prove harmful to occupant health. “We must always view cleaning and the health of a facility like a chain,” says Hanig. “All the links must be strong, including the cleaning of carpets, for the facility to be truly healthy.”

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