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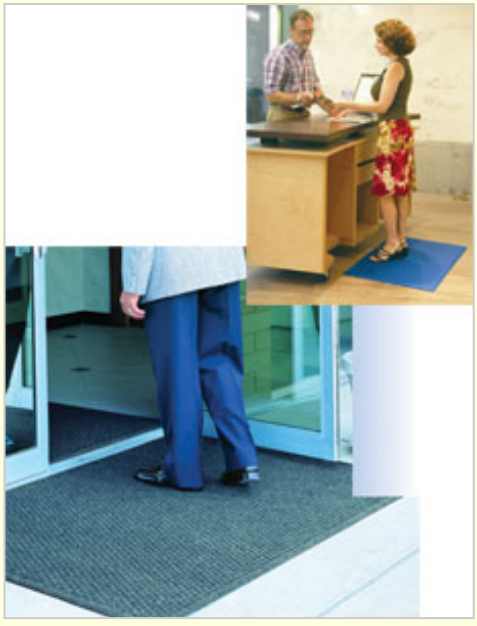
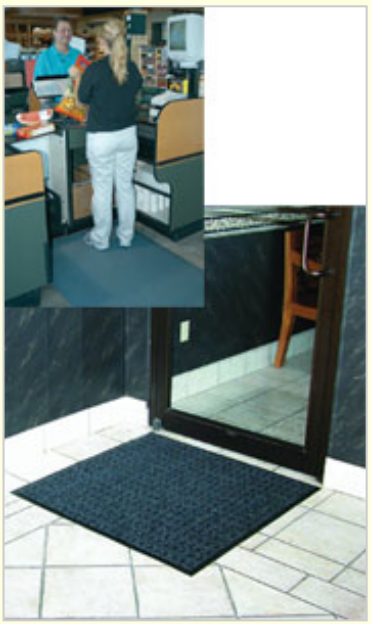
Magazine Article

Prevention: A Key to Effective Cleaning

Floor Care





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Michael Moore's new movie Sicko, which contends that the American system of private medical insurance is not working well and that other medical system such as those found in several Western countries would be better, has generated a storm of controversy. However, one aspect of the movie was accepted as probably true: the U.S. medical industry still needs to pay more attention to preventing illness instead of just treating people when they become ill. The movie points out that not only would this help protect the health of more people but it could help lower the cost of medical care substantially reduced.

Interestingly, a similar and just as critical analogy can be made of the way many facilities are maintained. Instead of preventing dust, soil, and contaminants from entering a facility, cleaners and managers spend much more time — and money — trying to remove pollutants once they have invaded the indoor environment. The cleaning, maintenance, health, and day-to-day operation of a facility can be dramatically improved if facility managers would place greater emphasis on preventing and storing soil from entering a facility, such as through the use of effective, high-performance matting systems.

And this is also one reason why an effective matting system is considered such a vital component in Green cleaning.

In fact, incorporating an effective matting system can actually have several benefits, among them:

Keeping and storing as much as 85 percent of all out door soil, moisture, and other pollutants from "walking in" a facility. Improving indoor air quality. Extending the life cycle of indoor flooring, floor finishes and polishes, as well as carpeting. Adding aesthetic appeal. Promoting and identifying a facility by placing logos in the matting. Reducing injuries, slips, trips, and falls. Lowering cleaning and maintenance needs and reducing related labor and cleaning costs.*

The Matting "System"

Many facilities only think about mats during adverse weather conditions, such as rain or snow. Yet, an effective matting system is so essential that it should be addressed during the actual design phase of a facility — just as lighting, landscaping, and other features are considered — and not after a facility has been constructed, if at all possible.

Facilities that do include mats on a regular basis, usually only place a 3 x 5 ft. or a 4 x 6 ft. mat outside major entries — believing this is all the matting necessary under normal conditions. However, matting experts say it takes six to 10 paces before 85 percent or more soil is removed from someone's shoes. As a result, a facility's minimal combined length of its matting system should be 18 ft. or more.

To effectively use matting requires that it always be viewed as a "system" since there are actually three

different types of mats that need to be placed at a facility's major entries. The three most common types of mats in an effective system include:

Coarse-fiber scraper mat — Should be placed outdoors (or vestibule area between sets of doors) to remove large particles, is the first line of defense. If possible, there should be a minimum of six feet long and located outside all entry doors.

Scraper mats have knobby or squeegee-like projections that remove the bulk of dirt and soil. Generally, the higher the projection, the better the cleaning and holding capacity. An effective scraper mat will have a "well," allowing it to hold more soil and moisture between cleanings.

Indoor scraper mat — Approximately six feet or longer, should be placed directly inside a facility to help remove fine particles that are not captured by the outdoor scraper mat. Generally, these mats are made from nylon or combinations of nylon and heavily textured piles of polypropylene that can perform both a scraping action and allow for moisture wicking (moisture flows to the top of the mat). Absorbent mat — Used to remove moisture, it's the final component in the system. Usually about eight feet long, these mats are often made from polypropylene with a course fiber surface that will capture and hold any remaining particles or moisture.

All three matting components should have an anti-skid backing or a similar locking system to reduce sliding and tripping hazards. And, the mats must be regularly cleaned. Regular vacuuming is a must and some exterior/interior scraper mats may need to be hosed down to remove heavy soil accumulation or cleaned with a carpet extractor. Improper cleaning of the mats can lead to early failure of the matting system and result in soil "walked" into the facility.

The Green Connection

Because mats are able to capture and store soils, preventing them from entering a facility, they are considered an essential part of Green cleaning as referenced earlier. Storing means that the mat "holds" soil in a place where it can be effectively and safely be removed later by vacuuming or through carpet extraction.

Whenever the number of contaminants entering a facility has been minimized, it helps reduce the amount of cleaning and cleaning chemicals necessary to maintain a facility. This helps protect indoor air quality and helps lessen the possibility that volatile organic contaminants (VOCs) — often released into the air when using conventional cleaning products — will be released.

In fact, so significant are effective matting systems that at least one point toward LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification can be earned just by placing a minimum of 10 ft. of high quality matting at all major entrances. High-performance matting systems are also recommended by all the leading Green cleaning advocates in the jan/san industry.

Mats Save Money

Having an effective, high performance matting system in place also often translates into significant cost savings. This is especially true of hard-surface floor maintenance, which is the most labor-intensive and usually one of the most costly cleaning tasks necessary in any facility.

*For instance, according to one industry study, on average, there are approximately 26 lbs. of soil per 1,000 people that is tracked into a typical commercial or educational facility each month — much of which could be captured with an effective matting system. This is enough soil to strip approximately 42 percent of a floor's finish off in the first nine feet of flooring. In time, more of the finish will be removed over a larger surface area and require that the entire area be cleaned, scrubbed, and then refinished. ***

And, in another study conducted by ISSA, it was determined that it costs as much as $600 to remove one pound of dirt from a facility. This is primarily labor and does not include the added cost of chemicals or equipment.

Obviously, without a proper matting system in place, the amount of soil entering a facility can dramatically increase the costs to clean and maintain the facility. Further, an effective matting system helps reduce the need for cleaning. And, ironically, any products, systems, or procedures that can help reduce the need for cleaning are key components of Green cleaning because they help reduce cleaning's impact on the environment.

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A graduate of Brock University with a bachelor of business administration, Sawchuk also has an MBA from McMaster University.

As a frequent presenter at seminars and trade shows as well as author of several articles discussing Green cleaning issues, Sawchuk is recognized as a "hands-on" expert on Green cleaning chemicals and systems.

** ISSA*

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