

September 2010

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Proper Carpet Selection and Maintenance

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Many churches prefer their sanctuary, office, and common areas to be partially or fully carpeted. This is because carpets muffle noise, providing a serene, comfortable setting for churchgoers and staff. However, selecting the right carpet—one that can withstand foot traffic, hide soiling, and be cost-effective—and knowing how to maintain that carpeting once it is purchased does require doing some homework.

The following suggestions can help church facility managers to better understand the issues surrounding proper carpet selection and maintenance. However, in regards to carpet selection specifically, nothing can replace a knowledgeable carpet distributor or sales professional who can suggest carpeting that will best meet your specific needs.

Carpet Construction

A carpet's construction is the key to its life expectancy. The most important aspect of this construction is carpet density. This refers to how close together the carpet strands or fibers are weaved into the base of the carpet; the more fibers there are, the tighter the stitching is and the denser the carpet is.

This affects both how the carpet looks and how it performs. Extremely dense carpets can last for years. High-density carpets are sometimes more costly than others; however, since they also last longer and perform better, they actually save customers money over time. Several different methods are used to determine carpet density, and a credible carpet salesperson can be invaluable in deciphering this information.

Carpet Fiber Systems

For many years, wool was the carpet material of choice in both residential and commercial facilities. There was good reason for this: wool carpeting is durable, resists staining, is flame-retardant, and can be easily dyed and styled into a variety of patterns. However, it can also be somewhat difficult to clean.

Today, most homes and facilities use carpets made of olefin (polypropylene) and nylon. In recent years, nylon has become the fiber of choice in most settings. Nylon carpeting is available in a variety of colors and designs and resists staining. In fact, both of these synthetics offer most of the benefits of wool (although not all) and tend to be less expensive as well. In addition, they can usually be cleaned using a variety of cleaning methods, from shampooing to hot water extraction.

Color Choices

In church facilities, just as in homes and other settings, people choosing new carpeting often make the product's color their first, if not main, consideration. Of course, it comes as no surprise that people want a product that will look nice in their facility, but is color the only factor that influences this outcome? The answer is no.

For instance, one church selected a light blue carpet because managers believed it would look best in their facility. However, within a few months, soiling was noted on the new carpet, and managers found they had to clean them every three to four months. This soon became quite costly.

These administrators learned a hard lesson: the color of carpeting is important, but it should not be the primary concern. Carpeting should be selected based on how well it will perform and hold its appearance over time. Very light and very dark tones tend to reveal soiling, such as the light blue carpet mentioned earlier, while patterns, tweeds, and “heathered” (muted) tones tend to hide it.

Maintenance

Proper carpet maintenance is crucial. In fact, according to the Carpet Buyers Handbook, an online resource for carpet information, “The maintenance [of the carpet] will have a greater effect on the appearance of the carpet...than any other single factor.”

The key to carpet maintenance is regular vacuuming with a high-performance vacuum cleaner. This can remove as much as 80 percent of dry soils, according to The Building Office Managers Association (BOMA).

Carpets should also be cleaned one to three times per year depending on use. A variety of carpet cleaning methods are now available. Some facilities use “dry” cleaning systems, in which a powdery chemical is sprinkled onto the carpets, “agitated” into the carpet fibers by a machine, and then vacuumed, removing the cleaning chemical along with soils in the carpet. Carpets can also be shampooed or bonnet cleaned.

However, most experts view these methods as interim cleaning methods at best. The most thorough way to clean carpets, according to experts, is hot-water extraction. Selecting the right extractor—typically a portable machine, which works well in a church facility—is very important. Some of the things managers should consider when selecting a portable extractor are:

Heat

Some machines have “on-demand” or instant heat technology that heats the cleaning solution to temperatures as high as 212 degrees F. Heat improves the efficacy (effectiveness) of carpet cleaning chemicals; because less chemical may be necessary, this can be more environmentally responsible as well.

Certification/Approvals

Some carpet extractors have been independently tested and, if they meet specific standards, are

certified by the Carpet and Rug Institute (CIRI) under its "Seal of Approval" program. Extractors that have been awarded the Gold seal of approval are considered the most effective.

Hoses

At least one manufacturer now offers a built-in hose reel system on some of their extractors. This system helps organize the cleaning process and improves safety by ensuring that just enough hose is used for the task at hand.

Power

Systems that can generate adjustable psi (pounds per square inch of pressure) from 0 to 500 are more effective at removing deeply embedded soils and can also be used on more delicate fabrics, such as upholstery.

Warranties

A final consideration is carpet warranties. Carpet manufacturers tend to be very specific as to what they will and will not cover and under what circumstances. The way the carpet has been installed and maintained can impact the warranty. Always read the warranty carefully when purchasing new carpeting, especially the fine print. If something is not clear, ask questions. This can prevent a lot of headaches should there be a problem with the carpet in the future.

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