

Published in Progressive Grocer

Showcasing Supermarket Floors

By Robert Kravitz

For floor care technicians, maintaining grocery store floors often feels like a never ending battle. On the one hand, store managers view the cleanliness and appearance of their floors as crucial not only for the health and safety of their shoppers, but as a marketing tool as well. A clean, high gloss floor impresses and appeals to customers, providing a positive, high-quality image of that supermarket that can be very long lasting and lead to loyal shoppers.



However, on the other hand, floor care technicians must contend with such factors as the following on a regular, if not daily, basis:

- Rain, dirt, and mud that customers and staff “walk in” to the store
- Broken eggs that ooze out of cartons onto floors
- Shopping carts that mar the floors
- An assortment of spills
- Dropped fruits and vegetables
- Leaky milk cartons.

On top of this, there is the normal wear and tear on floors which is common at a busy store location. From small independent retailers to mega-grocery stores, which are now usually open 24 hours a day, floor care and maintaining a quality appearance are challenging demands when foot traffic levels are high. For large 24/7 locations, the number of shoppers typically dwindles between 1 a.m. and 5 a.m., but many of these locations tend to use these hours to pull, push, and drive pallets of food and merchandise up and down aisles.

Fortunately, all is not lost and there are successful ways to maintain grocery store floors, regardless of size, location, foot traffic, store hours, etc. Stores can maintain the “wet look” so many managers want and also floor safety. Further, if implemented properly, a floor care program can also prove to be a cost savings as well.

The High Frequency Supermarket Floor Maintenance Program

Daily (high frequency) cleaning is the single most important element in a supermarket floor maintenance program, according to Michael Schaffer, president of Tornado® Industries, manufacturers of professional cleaning equipment, including a large selection of floor care machines. “This typically involves daily dust mopping, damp mopping, automatic scrubbing, and burnishing,” he says. “Additionally, the type and quality of finish applied to the floor not only protects the floor—[helping to] minimize maintenance needs—[but it] also provides the look and appearance desired.”



According to Schaffer, both in-house and contracted cleaning crews are very effective at dust and damp mopping supermarket floors when supplied with the right tools. And, this should be done not only daily, but also throughout the day in a busy supermarket location.

However, these floor care tasks are really designed to only remove light grit, soils, and spills found on the top of the floor’s surface. Auto-scrubbing removes soil particulates that have worked their way into floor pores.

“These (worked-in soils) are what causes the discoloring of floors and if left unattended, can damage the floors as well,” Schaffer says.

“Auto scrubbers help prevent this discoloring and protect the floors by

removing contaminants, such as soil, residue in porous areas, and oil and grease (both organic/inorganic), as well as the embedded grit walked in by foot traffic.”

There are different styles of automatic scrubbers (see sidebar) but all are designed to do the following:

- “Lay down” cleaning solution on the floor
- Scrub the solution into the floor
- Vacuum away the solution, moisture, and any soils, grit, and contaminants.

The entire procedure is also designed to be performed in one step. This improves worker productivity significantly, helping to reduce labor costs. And because as much as 90 percent of the cost of floor care is labor, this is a key cost savings. (More about costs below)

When selecting an automatic scrubber, Schaffer says, some of the attributes managers and floor care technicians should look for include:

- Select a “world class” machine. This means the machine is designed to work on a wide variety of floors and meets specific standards as to craftsmanship, durability, versatility, and is comfortable to use for a broad diversity of users.

- Machines made with a rotomold, polyethylene body are lighter than metal machines, have proven to be exceptionally durable, and don't rust or dent like metal machines.
- To reduce downtime, a machine with a "clam shell" design opening allows for easier access to tanks, batteries, motor, and other components.
- AMG-type batteries are recommended because they are safer for the user and more eco-friendly.

Along with auto-scrubbing, supermarket floors typically need to be burnished. In some cases, this may need to be done each day to remove surface imperfections remaining after automatic scrubbing and, of course, to achieve the "wet look" gloss. However, it is important that the floor's surface be as clean as possible before burnishing. If not, dirt and grit can literally be burnished into the floors, causing damage and discoloring.

Chemicals and Finishes

The effectiveness of a high frequency supermarket floor maintenance program depends heavily on the selected chemicals and finishes that are applied to the floor. Many retail supervisors, along with other facility managers, are transferring to Green cleaning methods, especially when it comes to floor care equipment and chemicals. (See sidebar: Why Select Green Floor Care Chemicals)

However, a change to Green floor care can be a challenge since many of the chemical ingredients used in this area of maintaining and

cleaning are powerful and potentially harmful to the environment and the user. Furthermore, these chemical products, such as floor finishes, may contain zinc and other metals, which have been hard to “Green-replicate.”

“Fortunately, in the past couple of years, floor care cleaners, restorers, strippers, deep scrub products, as well as finishes have been introduced that are environmentally preferable,” says Mike Sawchuk, vice president and general manager of Charlotte Products and Enviro-Solutions, Green chemical manufacturers based in Ontario, Canada. “And, many of these have proven to be comparable and, in some cases, perform better than the conventional products they have replaced.”

This also includes environmentally preferable ultra-high-speed (UHS) floor finishes that are designed to be burnished. As mentioned earlier, the finish helps provide a glossy shine and protects the floor, “and a high performing UHS floor finish is designed to ‘snap back’ and provide the high gloss shine as soon as it is burnished,” says Sawchuk.

Selecting the “right” UHS finish, continues Sawchuk, can make or break a supermarket floor maintenance program. “Not only should it be Green, it must be high quality [finish]. Choosing the wrong finish may not provide the desired look and worse, increase the time, labor, and costs necessary to maintain the floor,” he says.

Cost Issues

As most managers know, floor care can be labor intensive and, therefore, very costly. However, there are ways to address this problem that not only help reduce floor care maintenance costs, but can help protect the environment as well. The first step is to make sure floor care technicians have been properly trained to perform floor care. Industry organizations, such as the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC), the International Sanitary Supply Association (ISSA), which is the worldwide cleaning industry association, and others offer ongoing floor care training programs. “Additionally, many distributors of cleaning products and equipment provide professional training and seminars on floor care as well,” adds Sawchuk.

In addition to adequate training, selecting the proper floor care equipment is one of the most significant ways managers can reduce floor care costs. This especially applies to the size of the machine, according to Schaffer. “Most supermarkets should select the largest sized floor equipment they can use in their stores,” he says. “Too small, and it will increase the time necessary to perform the task. Too large, and it will not be easy to use or maneuver. But, the right-sized equipment can reduce floor care time and costs dramatically.”

Robert Kravitz is a former building service contractor, author of two books on the professional cleaning industry, and now a writer for the professional cleaning and building industries. He may be reached at 773-5253021.

Sidebar:

Why Select Green Floor Care Chemicals

Although they have served us well for decades, we now know that many chemicals used in floor care include ingredients that:

- Are known to be both carcinogenic or to contain toxins that can harm reproductive health.
- Contain zinc or other heavy metals that may negatively influence human and animal health and may even be toxic.
- Have more than 7 percent volatile organic compounds (VOC) after dilution with water. VOCs are gases that may have short- and long-term adverse health effects.
- Contain such ingredients as aqueous ammonia, ethylene glycol monomethyl ether (EGME), and/or ethylene glycol monoethyl ether (EGEE), which are irritants to the skin and eyes and can damage internal organs.
- Have a total phosphorous concentration of more than 0.5 percent.

Contain 2-butoxy ethanol, a chemical common in many conventional strippers, that can be absorbed through the skin and damage the liver and kidneys. ~~ Mike Sawchuk

(A comprehensive technical report by GreenSeal on Green floor care products may be found at http://www.enviro-solution.com/pdf/CGR_floorcare.pdf)

Sidebar:

Want to Ride, Push, or Walk Behind?

Although there are many models and types of floor care machines, such as burnishers, automatic scrubbers, buffers, and now cylindrical, there are actually only three main categories:

Ride-on. Often described by people from outside of the industry as a “zamboni” type machine, the floor care technician actually rides on or stands up on the unit to clean and scrub floors.

Push. Some floor machines, such as standard buffers, are pushed and pulled over floors. These machines are traditionally used in smaller areas to strip, refinish, and polish floors.

Walk behind. As the name implies, the user walks behind the floor machine, guiding and directing it over the floor. Many automatic scrubbers are designed to be walk behind machines.

~~ Mike Schaffer