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Floor Care: The Higher Mat

by *Christopher R. Tricozzi*

Selecting entryway and other matting systems for facilities can be confusing, especially when a facility has a green cleaning system in place. To help clear up this confusion, jansan distributors should work with facility managers, concentrating on several issues, including:

- What makes a mat “green”
- The role matting plays in green cleaning
- What a high-performance matting system is
- The different types of mats as well as the roles they play in protecting the health and appearance of a facility.

Green Mats

Distributors might start with a discussion of what a green mat is not. For instance, the mere fact that a mat is recyclable or made from recycled materials does not make it a green mat. Although some manufacturers may make this claim, neither the current guidelines of the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification program nor the Green Seal™ GS-42 Environmental Standards for Cleaning Services indicates this as a requirement. Instead, both organizations simply point to the importance of matting in a green cleaning program as well as the lengths and types of matting required for LEED certification credits.

Additionally, distributors should point out to their clients that rarely does a “rental” mat supplied by a rent-a-mat service qualify as a green mat. Why? Although these services offer a number of conveniences, and the vendor will deliver and install a clean, attractive mat at major

building entries on a frequent basis, these mats are typically of relatively poor quality; furthermore, they last a comparatively short period of time and have limited effectiveness. They may help prevent a slip and fall during wet weather and remove some dirt and soil from shoe bottoms, but they usually do not meet the criteria currently mandated by the USGBC and Green Seal for a green matting system.

Knowing what a green mat is not helps make it easier to define its properties. Usually, green mats are referred to as high-performance matting systems. Distributors can explain to their clients that this means the mats:

- Are of much higher quality than rental or more conventional mats
- Are designed to last for many years, something that will often be reflected in the mat's extended warranty
- Are of a recommended length so that they can perform effectively
- Usually work together with other high-performance mats as a "system"
- Perform specific functions so that more than 80 percent of the contaminants, soil, and moisture that enter a facility are trapped by the matting system.

Effectively keeping soil outside is what makes a high-performance matting system green. According to Stephen Ashkin, a longtime advocate of green cleaning and president of The Ashkin Group, LLC, and executive director of the Green Cleaning Network, keeping soils and contaminants outdoors helps minimize the amount of chemicals and cleaning necessary to maintain a facility.

Because the goal of green cleaning is to reduce cleaning's impact on health and the environment, any products, procedures, or systems that result in less chemical use and reduced cleaning needs are considered part of a green cleaning system. "High-quality and appropriately sized entry matting systems [are] an integral part of every green building," says Ashkin. "They are one of the best pollution-prevention strategies that can be employed to reduce soils before they enter a building."

The USGBC concurs with Ashkin. Facility managers incorporating green cleaning and seeking LEED certification must utilize entryway systems—more specifically, they must place high-performance mats at all building entries "to reduce the amount of dirt, dust, pollen, and other particles entering the building."

High-Performance Mats

The key to a high-performance matting system is not only its ability to capture soils, moisture, and contaminants before they enter a facility, but also to store them as well. Whereas a conventional rental-type mat

can quickly become saturated with soil and moisture and become ineffective, a high-performance matting system contains the soil and moisture until they are removed safely by proper cleaning, with minimal environmental impact.

Some high-performance mats have the capacity to accomplish this function due to their bi-level construction. As foot traffic passes over the mat, soil and water fall below the upper surface of the matting and are stored. This keeps them from being transferred into the building. By contrast, once a conventional mat becomes saturated, the soil and moisture actually reattach to the shoe, defeating the purpose of the mat.

In addition to the bi-level construction, the length of the matting system is important. According to Green Seal, a high-performance matting system includes mats placed both outside and inside a facility, the overall length of the matting running from 12 to 20 feet. Also, the mats should be specific types:

Scraper mats. These mats, often referred to as “the first line of defense,” are placed outside of a facility; they aggressively scrape dirt, debris, and snow from shoes, trapping those substances beneath the mat’s surface. Typically, five feet of scraper matting should be installed at all major entry points to effectively trap as much as 50 percent of the soil and moisture on shoes.

Wiper/scraper mats. Designed as the second step in the process of removing soil and moisture from shoe bottoms, these mats are also about five feet in length. They are typically found directly inside a facility and help remove soils and moisture that are not captured by the outdoor scrapers. Often, buildings with a double-door entry system will place wiper/scraper mats in the vestibule area between the two sets of doors.

Wiper mats. These mats are the final part of a high-performance matting system and should also be about five feet long. Considered the final line of defense preventing outdoor contaminants from entering a facility, they typically ensure that the first step taken off the high-performance system and onto the facility’s hard-surface floor or carpeting is clean, dry, and soil free.

Care & Maintenance

Of course, high-performance matting systems must also be properly maintained to perform effectively. Distributors should advise their clients that matting placed at a typical building entry would likely need to be vacuumed at least once if not two or three times during the course of the day. The frequency of cleanings may increase depending on the amount of foot traffic, weather conditions, and other factors.

In addition, because the mats store soil and moisture below the surface, the mats will eventually need to be more thoroughly cleaned. Whereas a rental mat must be washed in large washing machines with large amounts of water and strong chemicals, high-performance matting systems can be properly cleaned by using a prespray—which minimizes chemical use—and low-moisture carpet extractors on a schedule determined according to building traffic and soil buildup.



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