

Restroom Floor Cleaning Training Workers To Do It The Right Way

BY ROBERT KRAVITZ

Usually, improving restroom sanitation means effectively cleaning toilets, urinals and countertops as well as “high-touch” areas, such as doorknobs, light switches and dispenser controls. However, did you know that germs can also spread via restroom floors?

This often surprises people—in and outside the cleaning industry. But, restroom patrons have more contact with floors—in one way or another—and the germs and bacteria found on these surfaces than initially realized. And, research has been conducted to support the health hazards that floors present. Dr. Charles Gerba, a microbiology professor at the University of Arizona, conducted a study to see if germs are passed on to men and women differently in an office environment. An alarming discovery of the investigation found that one-third of the women’s purses had evidence of fecal matter and other contaminants—a problem that only affected the women.

How could this happen? The researchers found that the women placed their handbags on the floor while in the restroom. The contaminants collected on the purses and, as they were touched, germs and bacteria were spread to the women’s hands, which are an ideal place for further cross-contamination.

Another situation involved a trial attorney, who represented employees of an industrial facility that was stricken with disease and illness. The attorney’s job was to find out how and why these employees were becoming ill and if it was the result of negligence on the employer’s part. It was discovered that the employees, who wear special shoes while on the shop floor, would walk on contaminated restroom floor surfaces during the course of the work shift.

When the workers removed their shoes, germs and bacteria transferred from the bottom of the shoes to their hands, starting the chain of cross-contamination.

Although the Centers for Disease Control lists hand-washing as the number one defense against cross-contamination, proper floorcare is still vital to prevent health hazards as we have seen.

Enhanced Training Methods

Since restroom floors can be disease spreading culprits, facility managers and building service contractors (BSCs) must devise ways to help keep floors not only clean, but sanitized and hygienic as well. To do this, a much greater emphasis must be placed on cleaning, worker training, and proper chemical and floor equipment selection.

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“As soon as I hire a new employee, I tell them to forget everything they have learned about cleaning,” says Danny Cassasanto, chief engineer and building maintenance director at Chicago’s Jones College Prep. “I want them to learn how to clean my way because I know it works and it keeps our students and staff healthy.”

Among Cassasanto’s techniques is the “tell, show, do, and review method.” In a classroom-type setting, new workers are shown how the restroom floors are to be cleaned, why effective floor cleaning is crucial, and how it can be done in a fast, yet thorough manner.

From here, cleaners are shown the method used in the college, which has proven to be effective and successful. Then, each new staff member must perform the task as they have been informed and shown.

“This is not a one-time training program,” says Cassasanto. “Reviews are ongoing to make sure workers do not develop any bad habits or perform cleaning tasks the ‘old way,’ which they may have been taught somewhere else.”

Indeed, ongoing training is essential. According to David Frank, president of the American Institute for Cleaning Sciences, approximately one in 10 cleaning workers either forget what they have been taught or are poorly trained from the start.

Many cleaning experts agree that on-going scheduled training sessions on floorcare techniques should be interactive, hands-on, and even involve skills testing and performance evaluation. In some cases, facility managers and BSCs are also incorporating technology-based training programs that use restroom floorcare CD-ROMs. Tested in educational facilities, these programs have been proven to be very effective.

Chemical Selection

In many situations, when restroom floors have been evaluated, researchers find that either too much or too little cleaning chemical is used and often, the chemical is not designed to kill germs, bacteria and other contaminants.

“When too much chemical is used, it can act like a magnet, gathering more and more soil and germs,” says Kyle McCabe, engineering manager for Tornado Industries, a leading manufacturer of professional cleaning equipment. “[When cleaners use] too little, even if it is the correct cleaning chemical, the product just cannot be as effective as it was designed.”

To properly dilute floorcare chemicals, many facility managers and BSCs now use auto-dilution systems. Auto-dilution systems alleviate the guesswork involved with mixing the chemical and water, which ensures the chemical will perform at its best. These systems can also help prevent costly waste.

Selected cleaning chemicals for floor-care should include disinfectants and/or sanitizers to help eliminate cross-contamination. Sanitizers and disinfectants—if correctly diluted, allowed time to dwell on floor surfaces, and properly used— can kill most of the germs and bacteria found on the restroom floors of schools, office buildings, and similar

facilities.

However, these powerful cleaning products and their use have traditionally had a negative impact on cleaning workers as well as building occupants. Fortunately, several jan-san chemical manufacturers have recently introduced chemicals that are effective at eliminating bacteria, viruses, and other germs, while having a reduced impact on the environment.

Floor Care Equipment

Selecting the proper floor care equipment to maintain restroom floors is imperative for two reasons: it will improve worker productivity and it will help remove contaminants from restroom floors.

In most settings, the cost of floor care is 10 percent supplies and 90 percent labor. Using poorly-performing products and equipment has a direct impact on these costs and strains worker productivity.

“Additionally, the user must be sure the proper pad is being used,” says McCabe. “The most effective floor machine may prove ineffective if the wrong pad is being used.”

Floor pads, placed on the bottom of rotary floor machines, were introduced in 1958 and have since become many cleaning workers’ “blessing,” when it comes to floor maintenance. However, they are not designed to clean uneven surfaces, such as the tiled floors that are often found in restrooms, “or floors with surface irregularities,” McCabe adds. “In these situations, floor brushes will likely be more effective because they can better penetrate porous and uneven floors.”

Additionally, McCabe questions if conventional rotary machines are always the best choice for restroom floor maintenance. “Restrooms are usually small spaces, and a rotary machine can be difficult to operate in a small [or large] space even by an experienced user,” she says. “Some BSCs have found cylindrical floor machines easier to operate.”

Cylindrical floor care machines are square, not round, and have counter-rotating brushes on each side that rotate at 1,000 RPMs or more. The equipment requires minimal effort to maneuver and, according to McCabe, effectively removes soils from floor pores and grout.

“They also have greater floor contact pressure, about 3.5 psi (pounds per square inch),” she says. “This is six times the contact pressure of a conventional machine and, along with the brushes, [this] has proven to be an effective combination at removing floor-based contaminants in many situations.”

A floor’s appearance has always been important. Many people judge a facility, for better or worse, depending on the floor’s appearance.

However, we now know that proper floor care is much more important than just appearance because it can also help protect the health of building occupants and workers. With training and proper chemical and floor care equipment selection, floors can not only look great, but help improve a facility’s health as well.

