



Winter Conditions Yield Floor Advisories

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Although facility managers are not expected to predict weather patterns, these individuals must be on alert when it comes to seasonal trends and safeguarding their buildings.

During winter months, for instance, snow and ice can enter buildings and put every occupant and floor surface at risk.

The most pressing mistake a facility manager may make is not preparing ahead of stormy weather.

Proactive facility management teams should practice risk assessment and strategize with adequate floor care, including the use of high-performance matting systems.

Chances are good, especially for states in Northeastern America and Canada, that if this winter is like past winter seasons, it will require the use of snow- and ice-melt products, such as rock salt.

While usually effective at safeguarding outside areas, sand and rock salt can be detrimental to indoor surfaces, such as hard flooring.

Furthermore, without proper planning, snow and ice can enter a facility, resulting in dangerous situations and unsightly surfaces.

Winterize Your Floor Care Program

Rock salt, also known as sodium chloride or halite, is a commonly used ice-melt product.

It was first employed as a deicer in the 1940s and since then facilities have appreciated its effectiveness and relatively inexpensive price tag.

However, we now know that rock salt can damage concrete and interior floor surfaces and can harm vegetation and wildlife.

Still, the price is right for many owners and managers, and rock salt continues to be a mainstay in most facilities' snow- and ice-removal plans.

Therefore, indoor hard surface cleaning crews must be prepared to deal with this villain as well as its winter season cohorts — sand and moisture.

Facility managers and cleaning professionals must implement adequate moisture control and keep as much water outside the facility as possible.

Moisture, particularly from snow, that remains on shoe bottoms can lead to puddles and slippery surfaces inside the facility.

This hazard not only promotes slip and fall accidents but can also damage floors if left unattended.

This situation can likely be rectified by using tools such as these:

- High-performance matting systems
- Wet/dry vacuums
- Portable extraction machines to clean matting
- Plenty of dry microfiber mops
- Safety signage.

Further, managers should know that rock salt and other commonly used snow- and ice-melt products that enter the facility and remain on hard surface floors can permeate the floors' finish.

Regardless of the flooring type, modern-day floor finishes are no match for these products, and the result is unsightly residue and potential floor discoloration.

Cleaning professionals can utilize a neutralizing conditioner to help reduce the risk of damage and remove residue.

After using the conditioner, workers can apply an all-purpose cleaner to further maintain the surface and protect its finish.

Sand is also prevalent during harsh winter months.

While providing slip and fall protection, sand can enter the facility and erode floor finish.

Regular vacuuming, mopping and buffing can minimize any problems associated with sand, including scratched surfaces.

If possible, autoscrubbers should also be part of daily winter floor care programs.

These machines can deep scrub floor surfaces and ensure removal of rock salt and sand.

Additionally, autoscrubbers are known to remove embedded soils and contaminants — often missed by a mop — which can eventually wear down and eat away at a floor's finish.

Matting: Quality Assurance

While the steps already described are necessary, these suggestions can be time consuming, expensive and impractical to maintain at an acceptable level for many facilities.

Floor care chemicals and equipment tend to be expensive, but costs are marginal compared to the labor costs needed to uphold these cleaning demands, especially in high-traffic facilities.

Particularly today, when facilities are asked to stretch their budgets and downsize, effective matting systems can help save money, lower risk and contribute to the overall health of the built environment.

But, not any mat will do.

Often, out of a need to cut costs, facilities will make the mistake of penny-pinching and opt for inexpensive mats or, worse, smaller-cut rental matting.

Industry associations and experts stress the use of high-performance matting as a means of safeguarding floor surfaces and reducing the frequency of cleaning, which is a green benefit.

Statistics show that 70-80 percent of the dust, grime and dirt in public buildings is tracked in from the outside.

And, ISSA estimates that up to 24 pounds of dirt can be tracked into a facility by 1,000 people over a 20-day work period.

This dirt can permanently blemish hard surface flooring, while oil and grime tracked onto carpets can turn into permanent stains.

The amount of dirt and sand naturally increases during less-than-favorable snowy, icy and wintry conditions.

As to price, ISSA reports that the cost to remove just one pound of dirt after it is tracked through a building can exceed \$500.

This is an expense that can be considerably marginalized by using high-quality, high-performance matting.

Exterior matting is a preventative measure to help limit the amount of outdoor soils and contaminants that enter a building and negatively impact flooring and air quality.

Outside of facilities, a scraper mat of at least five feet is designed to remove large debris from shoe bottoms.

This exterior mat initiates a high-performance matting system's process.

Next, facility managers should provide at least five feet of wiper/scraper matting just inside the entrance.

This middle portion of the high-performance matting system is intended to further remove soils and moisture on shoe bottoms.

A wiper mat is the last line of defense in the system.

The goal of this mat is to completely remove any remaining soils and moisture before occupants step onto a hard surface floor.

It is recommended that this mat also be five feet long, bringing the length of the entire high-performance matting system to 15 feet, known to industry experts as the "Rule of 15."

At this length, the average person will step on the system four to six times with each foot.

In order to be considered a high-performance mat, the product must be able to last one year or more.

In fact, some high-quality, high-performance mats have warranties that extend for several years.

Cheap mats, such as those offered by rental companies, may have as low as a 90-day warranty and usually do not meet the stringent criteria mandated by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification program.

In order to be effective, the entire system must consist of high-quality matting.

If even one section uses a lower-quality option, the chain is broken and the facility will be exposed to such things as costly slip and fall lawsuits, expensive floor care tasks and an unhealthy environment.

The bottom line is that a minimum 15-foot wiper/scrapper dirt-reduction matting system applied to any entrance can save facility managers money; create a safe, healthy environment; protect interior floors; and look great all year long.

Unfortunately, the work doesn't end with the placement of high-performance matting.

The mats in the system will trap and capture approximately 80 percent of the contaminants, soil and moisture that would otherwise enter the facility.

Cleaning crews must continue to employ daily cleaning tasks, such as vacuuming.

In addition, especially during winter months, careful attention must be paid to — and ongoing moisture control should be practiced at — entranceways and high-traffic areas, such as lobbies.

Saturated entry matting tends to be ineffective.

A facility should be prepared with backup high-quality matting and use it as needed.

Cleaning crews should be instructed to monitor, extract and change mats as conditions warrant.

The winter months can wreak havoc on a facility that is not prepared for worst-case scenarios.

Facility managers who shop based on price rather than performance may be elevating risk and cost of ownership to maintain the building.

Keep dangers outside by winterizing your floor care program and implementing high-performance matting systems.

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About Crown Mats and Matting

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Crown sells matting through an extensive network of highly trained sales representatives throughout the United States and worldwide. These sales experts are familiar with the features and benefits of all matting systems and are able to help their clients find the right system for virtually any application.

