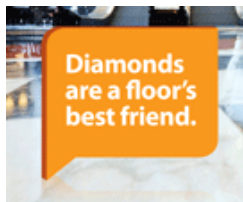




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Mats Will Only Work If They're Clean

By Cynthia Kincaid

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The price of replacing carpeting and hardwood flooring can be prohibitive, particularly in today's down economy. So protecting the investment in flooring is important. One of the best ways to do this

is to regularly clean a building's interior and exterior floor matting, especially in entrances and other high-traffic areas. In fact, numerous studies note that 80 percent of dirt comes into a building through its entrance.

"If you think about all of that going into your carpeting, you'd be almost crazy not to put in matting," says Gary Bright, vice president and general manager for Mission Janitorial & Abrasive Supplies, San Diego.

Keeping matting clean and maintained is so important to John Chittom, president of Athens Janitor Supply, Athens, Ga., that he makes it a point to emphasize its significance to all of his staff.

"We tell our staff that [cleaning mats] is the first line of defense," he



says. "If you trap dirt at the door, you don't have to clean it up elsewhere, and it doesn't circulate in the air for people to breathe."

Properly cleaned and maintained matting can also provide a defense against accidental trips and falls because mats provide people with a transition to dry off wet shoes, especially if they are walking onto marble or tile.

Routine Cleaning

Keeping matting properly cleaned and maintained, either throughout a building or around a building, is not difficult, but it must be done regularly.

"A lot of manufacturers recommend cleaning mats by using a vacuum cleaner, or sweeping them off, or hitting them with a hose and washing them," Bright says.

For indoor matting, Bright recommends vacuuming at least once a day and additional vacuuming should be based on the amount of foot traffic crossing the mats.

It's also important to mop or vacuum the flooring underneath the mat, says Chittom.

"If dirt gets underneath, a mat could slip on a hardwood floor," adds Fred Kfoury Jr., president of **Central Paper Products Co., Inc.**, Manchester, N.H.

For carpeted indoor mats that may require a deeper cleaning, removing the dirt through chemical washing, agitation and extraction can bring a dirty mat back to life. However, this type of cleaning does require some downtime.

"When you do that, you are injecting moisture into the mat. Most good mats are designed to hold moisture, so you've got to give it adequate time to dry out," says Chittom. "If the building doesn't operate over the weekend, clean them on Friday night and give those mats all weekend to recover."

To increase the lifespan of indoor mats, they should be on a scheduled rotation system, especially the mats that are placed in entryways or high-traffic areas.

"If you're going to take the approach that mats are an investment in protecting the building, and the inhabitants of the building, then protect that investment by vacuuming, cleaning, and rotating them out," says Chittom. "If you're vacuuming both sides every day, and rotating like you should, even in the highest traffic areas, your mats



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Exterior mats need just as much care and cleaning as interior mats, maybe more. A quality outdoor non-backed mat, one that is not affected by rain, moisture or snow, can be worth its weight in gold. While the dirt is designed to fall through to the floor below, the mat can still suffer from ground-in soil and will need to be routinely pulled up and washed off. The floor underneath the mat needs to be cleaned off, as well.

“If it gets nasty, then pressure wash it, rinse it off, and replace the mat,” says Chittom.

Cleaning underneath exterior mats is as important as cleaning the mats themselves. Bright cautions that neglecting this part of mat cleaning could be a problem over the long term.

“You want to clean the surface of the cement and not let that build up over a period of time, or you might not ever get it up,” he says.

The Price Of Neglect

Failing to regularly vacuum and deep clean interior mats not only can cause potential accidental slips and falls, but they can also cause the eventual breakdown of the mat. If this happens, the interior flooring and carpeting of a building may need more frequent cleaning and replacement.

“If you’re not going to maintain mats, don’t put them out,” says Chittom.

Failing to properly clean mats is like mopping a floor with dirty water, he adds, and once a mat is saturated with dirt, it will be of no help at all.

Just as bad, failing to rotate mats can present staining problems, especially for mats on hardwood or tile surfaces that have repeatedly gotten wet.

“When you go to strip and wax, and you pull an old mat away, the shadow of the mat remains,” says Chittom. “The moisture has counteracted with the backing of the mat, and you can’t strip it out once that has happened. So keeping that mat dry and clean from the bottom side is very important.”

Exterior mats function like a filter, says Bright, and failing to keep them properly cleaned and maintained can have the same clogging effect.

“Once a particulate filter gets full, it doesn’t take on any more particulates,” he says. “These mats are designed to hold so much dirt, but if you never clean them, sooner or later, when you walk on them with dirt on your feet, the dirt is not going to come off. It will come right into the building, so a cleaning program needs to happen.”

Still Need To Be Replaced

Eventually all mats, even good quality mats, are going to need replacing, not only for safety reasons, but for aesthetics, as well.

“If I am a customer coming into your building, I want to see a clean mat,” says Kfoury. “If it looks lousy, that’s not a terribly good selling point. I would think, ‘if the mat is dirty, what’s the company like?’”

Eventually replacing worn mats should be part of an overall cleaning program. Once a mat starts to show signs of deep wear, it’s time to retire the mat.

“They last for a long time if you take care of them, but they don’t last forever,” says Bright.

Besides being unsightly, worn out mats can also become hazards in the workplace.

“The majority of the claims in our industry are slips and falls,” says Chittom. “You don’t want to have a mat that is supposed to be protecting the building and the inhabitants become a trip hazard, and when mats start to fray at the corner, they start to curl.”

By keeping to a regular mat cleaning schedule, many mats will remain looking new and perform exactly as they were designed to do for many years. And the cost protection they provide for carpeting and hardwood floors throughout a building can be incalculable.

“You are getting a huge return on your investment for the time that mats last and for the job they do,” says Bright.

And, by properly and routinely cleaning them, the less maintenance and cleaning will have to be done on the carpeting, hardwood or marble floors throughout the building.

“Sand and dirt on feet is abrasive,” Bright says. “It scrapes the marble in the entrance and wears down the carpets. It damages your assets and the looks of the building.”

Bright makes it a practice to tell his customers the importance of not only investing in good quality mats, but also of maintaining them

“I try to tell customers that this is an investment, and it’s not nearly as much as you think when you look at what the mat is doing every day that somebody is walking on it,” he says. “Because mats enhance the look of a building, and the look of carpeting, they should be cleaned every day. If they are cleaned and taken care of, they last a long time.”

Cynthia Kincaid is a freelance writer based in Portland, Ore.

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