

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

(The importance of floor maintenance)

PERCEPTION IS EVERYTHING!

You walk into any building (offices, health care, school, supermarket, retail store) and what is the first thing you notice.... scuffed and dirty floors! What is your impression of that company or institution? First impressions in business are essential. The appearance of your facility makes a statement to most potential clients. In a survey of high school students selecting a college, 62 % said that the condition of the buildings during their campus visit played a major role in their choice. Studies have proven that retail sales increase when floors in the store (particularly at the entrance) are clean with a high gloss because people stay in the store longer! Obviously in the food processing industry, health care facilities and other similar industries, cleanliness of the floors and all other surfaces is critical to preventing contamination and spread of disease. People working in clean facilities have better morale, fewer health concerns and are more productive. Improved air quality and better lighting conditions are other by-products of clean, shiny floors. One large retail company saved over \$1 million in lamp replacement and lighting costs by increasing the quality of the shine on their floors.

STOP DIRT AT THE DOOR!

One critical element to making a positive impression (and saving money) is achieved at the entranceway by stopping dirt from entering the building. Investing in quality walk-off matting will pay off in the long run when you consider the \$500 cost of removing a pound of dirt that gets tracked into your facility. Stopping 80% of the dirt at the door by using proper matting is the best way to cut removal costs and maintain that positive impression you strive for. This element becomes even more critical in the areas that see significant snowfall and cold because of the use of ice melters. (See Mike's Corner articles about the three-mat system.)

MAKE THE MAINTENANCE EASIER!

Floor maintenance can be easier, quicker and more cost effective with the proper equipment, training and a good work schedule. There are four basic floor machines: 150-200 RPM low speed buffers (commonly called "swing machines"); 200-350 RPM high speed buffers; high speed burnishers (1000-1500 RPM) and ultra high speed burnishers (1500-3000 RPM). There is also a two-speed version of the swing machine allowing for both low speed cleaning and high speed buffing.

Swing Machines

The low speed swing machine is the most widely used floor maintenance machine because of its versatility, low cost and ease of use. These machines can be used for stripping, scrubbing, buffing all types of floors, sanding wood floors and shampooing rugs by adding a solution tank and a fountain brush. Swing machines range in size from 13" to 23" and are equipped with rear wheels that move out of the way during operation. Since the unit rests directly on the pad in use, the weight of the machine plays a role in the tasks performed. The name "Swing Machine" comes from the side-to-side arc the unit travels when being used. The high speed buffer is best used for scrubbing and buffing of hard surface floors. They are better than the low speed machines when used in a spray-buffing program. They are the same basic design as the swing machine and have the same size range. There are two speed machines available that combine the features of both of these units.

Burnishers

As with swing machines there are two speed ranges in burnishers - high speed and ultra high speed. These machines on first glance appear to be the same as the swing machine in design and size. On closer examination, you will notice that the rear wheels are fixed and remain in contact with the floor while in use. Some have front casters to control the amount of down force on the burnishing pad. Burnishers are designed to generate heat and friction that will smooth and harden floor finishes thus creating the desirable "wet look" with today's thermoplastic and polythermal finishes. The hardened finish, produced by a burnisher, is easier to maintain and will withstand more abuse. Burnishers are more expensive than swing machines but will pay off in the long run.



Pads & Brushes

Choosing which to use - pads or brushes - is usually a matter of your own preference. Brushes are better for cleaning natural stone tile or concrete floors than pads plus they tend to last longer. Pads are better for buffing and burnishing but also will do an excellent job of stripping and scrubbing. Today's pads range from natural fibers to high tech plastics. As a rule the darker the pad the more aggressive the action. Black is the most aggressive (Hi-Pro Black even more so) and white is the least. (See the pad selection guide under Floor Care). When choosing which pad to use, it is better to select something less aggressive.

USING THE MACHINES

Swing Machine

While the burnishing machine is easier to use, anyone can learn to operate a swing machine with some training and practice. (Ask a floor care professional about the first time he operated a swing machine and a smile will cross his face as he remembers how intimidated and nervous he felt!) First step is to learn the safe installation of the pad or brush and the safety features of the machine. When the machine is level the pad spins in one place. Move your hands up very slightly and the machine swings to the right; down slightly and it moves to the left. Note the word "slightly"! The best way to learn for the first time is, after checking to see if the machine is level as you hold it, to have someone hold the head of the machine when you start until you get the balanced position. Remember this simple hint for your hand movement to change the direction of the machine's swing:

L - L (lower - left)

R - R (raise - right)

If the machine starts to get away from you, release the trigger, lever or whatever device you squeezed, pulled or turned to start the machine. Hold onto the handle!!! (If you let go, the machine will spin wildly striking someone, probably you, causing serious injury.) Once you release the triggering device the machine will stop immediately.

Burnishers

Because the wheels maintain contact with the surface, the operation of the burnisher involves moving back and forth to cover the area. These are simple machines to operate and require less training and experience to operate proficiently than the swing machines. It is still critical to learn the safety features including proper installation of the pad and its holder. Have a good floor maintenance plan; train your staff thoroughly in the procedures for your maintenance system; use the correct chemicals properly diluted or applied, have the appropriate tools available to

CREATE A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION!