

# Convenience Store News

## Floor Maintenance More Important Than Retailers Think

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Most convenience store operators are well aware of how important it is to keep their floors looking their very best. However, some may not realize just how important this is.

A 2011 survey conducted by Harris Interactive asked 1,000 U.S. adults what factors would negatively impact their perceptions of a store. A surprisingly high 86 percent of those surveyed pointed to the floor. According to the survey, a store with soiled or poorly maintained floors would definitely be a factor in their decision to revisit that store again.

Unfortunately, floor care ó specifically, complete stripping and refinishing of the floor -- can be expensive, requiring the hiring of contract cleaners or store operators purchasing the tools and equipment to do the job themselves. It can also be disruptive, as the store will have to be sectioned off while certain floor areas are serviced or closed entirely in order for the job to be properly completed.

There are, however, ways to stretch refinishing cycles. This helps reduce the costs of floor care, minimize store disruptions or closings, and because floor care can have a negative impact on the environment, help protect the environment as well. It all boils down to having an ongoing, effective soil prevention and removal program. When floors are left unattended, the problems ô and costs ô multiply. But attended to regularly, these problems are minimized.

A daily maintenance program should involve the following four steps:

- Installing entry mats, as much as 15 feet, at all store entries.
- Vacuuming entry mats one or more times per day.
- Dust mopping or vacuuming the floor and damp mopping to remove grit, the big enemy of floor finish, as well as loose soils.
- Burnishing to restore the floor's shine.

It is also essential to select high-quality floor care chemicals and finishes. This is one area where you do get what you pay for. High-quality chemicals will typically work more effectively, reducing time and labor costs, and quality finishes can last longer, helping to reduce strip/refinishing cycles, which is one of the goals.

### **A Closer Look at the Maintenance Steps**

It is surprising how many facility managers are unaware of the importance of matting. Proper matting is so critical that those facilities seeking LEED certification are required to have them. The reason is simple: an effective matting system keeps as much as 80 percent of all moisture and soil outside. To best accomplish this, store owners should consider purchasing mats instead of renting them.

Very often, purchased mats are more effective at capturing and trapping soils and moisture and are made to last longer than rental mats. This means they can be cost effective in the long run.

The mats must also be kept clean, which leads us to our second step. As soils build up, the effectiveness of the matting can decline. Because most soiling is made up of dry soils, simply vacuuming with an effective vacuum cleaner helps ensure the high performance of the mat.

Dust and damp mopping the floor is also essential. It helps remove soils that not only negatively impact the appearance of the floor, but also can damage the floor. If mopping, always use clean mop heads and equipment, and change the water/solution and mop head frequently. As the mop becomes soiled, it can defeat the entire cleaning purpose by spreading soils to new floor areas.

It should also be noted that many facilities now vacuum their floors, typically using backpack vacuums, and this should be a consideration in convenience stores. Vacuuming with a backpack can be surprisingly fast, covering as much as 7,000 square feet per hour (dependent on the width of the floor tool used), and very effective. While dust mopping does collect soils and debris on floors, it can also spread them, just like damp mopping. Vacuuming with a backpack completely removes the soil from the floor.

### **Burnishing the Floor**

Burnishing a convenience store floor gets a bit more complicated. For that reason, we will address it separately from the other steps mentioned earlier. First, in order for a floor to really have a high-gloss shine, it requires that an ultra-high-speed (UHS) floor finish be applied. If the floor is well maintained, this will provide the maximum level of gloss. But this also requires the use of a UHS burnisher to maintain that gloss -- which is where the challenge lies.

Burnishers can be expensive, so there is a cost concern. Further, burnishers are typically designed to polish large floor areas. The ins and outs and narrow walkways of a convenience store can be a challenge with a burnisher.

Fortunately, a new generation of burnishers has been introduced that helps address these issues. These burnishers are less costly than larger, traditional systems, but the big benefit is that they are smaller and can clean smaller areas and more easily navigate small walkways. Further, some systems are battery operated. This helps improve safety -- no cords for the user or a customer to trip over -- improve worker productivity and provide added flexibility and maneuverability.

Except for stripping and refinishing floors, all of the steps discussed here can be performed in-house. They are not difficult. Even the small battery-powered burnishers are surprisingly easy to use. This makes proper floor care not only easy, but also cost effective. And because nice-looking floors build customer loyalty, it's a winning proposition all the way around.

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**Editor's Note:** The opinions expressed in this column are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of *Convenience Store News*.

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