

**POPULAR TOPICS** ENERGY EFFICIENCY EMISSIONS CARBON FINANCE FACILITIES SUPPLY CHAIN SUSTAINABILITY WATER SMART GRID MORE TOPICS »

call2recycle learn more Stay on top of data, news & analysis - get our free daily newsletter

Home » Making Floor Care More Sustainable

March 25, 2013

## Making Floor Care More Sustainable



Michael Schaffer  
Senior Executive, Floor Care Division  
Tacony

Browse all columns by **Environmental Leader**

### RELATED STORIES

- Sustainable Cleaning Continues to Evolve
- Chemical-Free Floor Care Product Design That's

**SEE MORE WAYS LOGISTICS CAN WORK FOR YOU.**

[LEARN MORE](#)

REPLAY

### RELATED TOPICS

- Chemicals
- Green Workplace
- Guest Column
- Sustainable Strategy & Leadership

floors—VCT, stone, ceramic tile, wood, and even bamboo—instead of carpeting.

There are many reasons why this switch makes sense. For one, hard surface flooring can last longer than carpeting in certain applications. Further, depending upon the application, hard-surface options often costs less to install and maintain.

Another flooring trend is choosing *not* to apply a finish to hard surface flooring. While this may work in some settings, applying floor finish is more than just an aesthetic choice. True, finishes are designed to produce an attractive shine. But their fundamental purpose is to protect flooring from scratches, heavy foot traffic, rolling carts, and more, all of which can damage the floor. Using the right floor care chemicals can also make floors safer, minimizing slip-and-fall accidents.

Although floor finishes are often the right choice for both appearance and maintenance reasons, they can present a problem when it comes to “greening” floor care. Some traditional floor care chemicals, especially strippers, contain a variety of potentially hazardous chemicals and ingredients. And that attractive shine mentioned earlier is often created by ingredients that can release high volumes of volatile organic compounds (or VOCs) into the indoor environment. Finishes also can contain a host of potentially dangerous ingredients. Thankfully, there are ways to make floor care green. And even better news, some manufacturers are developing more options to make floor care less harmful to the environment. To keep floor care green, cleaning professional need to remember three important facets about floor care maintenance: vacuuming, chemicals, and equipment.

### Vacuuming

Custodial workers typically clean floors using a dust mop, or even by simply sweeping them. These cleaning methods release considerable amounts of dust, soils, and contaminants into the air. This can negatively impact the health of cleaning workers. And once these contaminants become airborne, that dust can also spread throughout a facility. Cleaning professionals can eliminate this problem by vacuuming floors instead of sweeping and a wise alternative is to use a backpack vacuum cleaner.

When backpack vacuum cleaners (workers use a specially made harness to wear the machine on their backs) were first introduced to the industry, their key benefit was considered to be that they can speed up the cleaning process. But when these machines are equipped with a HEPA filter, they are also perfect for cleaning many types of hard surface floors. These filters trap 99.97 percent of all particles greater than 0.3 microns, preventing such contaminants from being released into the air, and helping to make floorcare greener.

### Chemicals

There are now scores of green-certified floor care chemicals on the market. Certification means these products meet specific criteria guaranteeing that they are safer than conventional floor care chemicals for both users and the environment.

There is, however, one problem: not all green floor care chemicals have comparable performance levels. To avoid choosing a less-than-optimal product, purchasers should work with a knowledgeable janitorial distributor to select those products that will work best on their floors. This may require some trial and error, but invariably a green equivalent will be found.

Cleaning professionals also need to be sure to properly dilute all floor care chemicals using cold water. Using hot water can potentially release harmful fumes during the dilution process.

### Equipment

Floor machines such as buffers and burnishers can also release considerable amounts of dust as they are used. To address this problem, purchasers should consider floor machines with a dust collection system. These systems capture dust and contaminants while the machine is in use. This improves indoor air quality and safeguards the health of cleaning workers.

REPLAY

**SEE MORE WAYS LOGISTICS CAN WORK FOR YOU.**

TODAY'S NEWS 3/22/2013 3/21/2013 3/20/2013

**Hershey to Source 10% Certified Cocoa by Year's End**

**IBM Mobile App to Help Solve Water Challenges**

**PRO** **Apple Sustainability Report: GHGs up 34%, Down Per Dollar**

**Environmental Executive Moves: Fisker, WRSScompass, Sionix, GreenBlue**

**CO2 Could Produce Valuable Chemical Cheaply**

**PRO** **Policy & Enforcement Briefing: Arkansas GHG Plan, Science Advisory, Keystone Vote**  
**Sushi Joint Serves Edible QR Codes, Sustainable Fish**

**Making Floor Care More Sustainable**

**PRO** **US Manufacturing Energy Consumption, Total and Major Sources, 2002-2010**

**PRO** **Goldman Sachs Clean Energy and Environmental Investments & Financing, 2006-2011**

**PRO** **Components of Onsite Generation, Select US Manufacturing Sectors, 2010**

**Wastewater Treatment Facility Switches to Dialight LEDs, Cuts Energy Use 50%**

**Google Employees Exposed to Cancer-Causing Chemical**

**Ford Slashes Water Use 8.5%**

**PRO** **H&M Sustainability Report: 95% of Factories Revealed**

**Sainsbury, Co-op, M&S Organic Sales Drop**

**Interserve to Halve CO2 Emissions by 2020**

**PRO** **Policy & Enforcement Briefing: SCOTUS on Logging, NV Energy 'Phony' Reports, Pfizer**

**Food Lion, Harveys, Reid's Win Energy Star Awards**

**Green Fleet Roundup: Cummins, Peterbilt Motors Company, Honda, Toyota, BYD**

**Cisco, IBM, Siemens Among 'Top 10 Smart Grid Vendors'**

**Whole Foods, Trader Joe's Say No to GMO Seafood**

**Chevron, Shell, Enviro Set Fracking Standards**

**Kellogg's Adopts How2Recycle Label**

**PRO** **Standards & Compliance Briefing: Steel CO2 Emissions, Recycled Concrete, Sediment Retention**

**5**

Another option to green floor care is to choose cylindrical brush floor machines. They tend to use less water and chemical than conventional floor machines because they have brushes rather than pads. Brushes are generally better able to remove soils from grout areas and porous tiles without depending on large amounts of water and chemical to do the job.

#### **The Importance of Training**

There is one more component to green floor care that managers should not neglect: proper training. Custodial workers switching to green products often receive training regarding properly using those products. They are also taught more effective ways to perform cleaning tasks. This not only helps green a facility, but can enhance its appearance as well.

Some managers believe their facilities actually look better after starting a green cleaning program. While this can be the result of using environmentally preferable cleaning products, more often it is because of the training that comes with them.

*Michael Schaffer is a senior executive with Tacony's Commercial Floor Care division. He is also president of Tornado Industries, which manufactures a full line of professional cleaning equipment and CFR brand carpet extractors that recycle water and cleaning solution.*

[Waste Management, Recyclebank Divert 179m Pounds to Recycling](#)

[National Geographic May Use Recycled Paper](#)

[Ecodesk Aims to Improve Supply Chain Emissions Reporting](#)

[Embedding Sustainability into Organizational Structure](#)

[ACEEE: 16 Efficiency Policies Could Save \\$1 Trillion](#)

[Nike Supply Chain to Use Bluesign Sustainability Tools](#)

[Starbucks Expands \\$70m Sourcing Program](#)

[Innovation and Sustainability](#)

[NRC: Car Petroleum Use, GHG Emissions Could Drop 80%](#)

[Verizon MAGIC Buses Cut CO2, Save Gas](#)