

Doug Berjer
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The middle ground choice in floor coverings



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Managers of long-term living facilities, nursing homes, and other types of healthcare buildings are typically in a quandary when it comes to selecting a floor covering. They like the cleaning and maintenance convenience of hard surface floors, such as vinyl composition tile (VCT). On most hard surface floors, if something is spilled, which often happens at these locations, it is relatively easy to clean it up.

Carpeting is a different story. A spill on a carpet, which is a foreign matter on the carpet fibers, can quickly become a stain, causing permanent discoloration if not attended to quickly. However, carpet does have its features and benefits. It reduces noise, can help insulate a facility, and adds a touch of luxury typically not possible with a VCT style floor.

So, can healthcare establishments get the best of both hard surface and carpet coverings? Some managers have found a middle ground in carpet tile. Also known as modular flooring, carpet tiles were first introduced in the 1950s. They were installed only occasionally until the 1970s and, in recent years, have become much more common.

For a healthcare facility, carpet tiles offer a number of benefits, including:

- Ease of maintenance: many carpet tiles are made of more durable and longer lasting fibers compared to conventional carpets.

- Cost effective: compared to wall-to-wall carpeting, modular flooring is typically less expensive to purchase and install.
- Potentially more sustainable: some forms of carpet tiles are made from a variety of recycled materials, even plastic bottles.
- If damaged, just the affected area needs to be replaced, which is often fairly quick and easy to do.
- They can communicate: often, healthcare facilities select specific colored carpet tiles to use as a pathway to a specific destination in a facility.

While modular flooring can be generally easy to maintain, there are some cleaning concerns managers should be aware of. For instance, modular flooring is usually installed without padding and, as a result, the tiles may flatten over time. This is not true of all tiles and it depends significantly on how the tile is manufactured. Typically, the best way to help reduce flattening for all carpet tiles is frequent vacuuming, especially in heavily trafficked areas, areas next to key entries, as well as areas around elevators.

Another carpet tile issue involves cleaning, particularly the moisture involved. In some cases, carpet tiles are installed with minimal or no adhesive. For other installations, every four or five tiles are glued to the floor to help secure the area. In other cases, each individual tile is glued to the floor.

When cleaning with a carpet extractor, which is the most effective way to clean carpet tiles and all carpets, it is important to use a machine that has powerful vacuum motors and a wand system specifically designed to remove as much moisture from the carpet tiles as possible.

If moisture, especially excessive moisture, gets under the tiles, they could loosen from the adhesive, which could possibly cause a trip and fall accident. Further, when moisture builds up under the tiles, the backing's ability to allow air flow through the tiles is hindered and mold and mildew can develop. Finally, wicking is another problem that arises if excessive moisture is applied or inadequately extracted when cleaning. Wicking is when soils as well as moisture wicks, or rises, to the surface of the tile, which negatively impacts the carpet tile's appearance.

As mentioned, the use of an advanced carpet extractor can alleviate the problems associated with excessive moisture when cleaning carpet tiles. These machines effectively apply and then remove moisture from the carpet as quickly as possible. This has another advantage as well, especially for a healthcare or long-term living facility: it helps ensure that a just cleaned area is open for foot traffic in a timely fashion.

With proper care and cleaning, carpet tiles can be a convenient, cost effective alternative to wall-to-wall carpet and many types of hard surface flooring. One key benefit, which is common for all carpeting, that is most appreciated by managers of healthcare facilities is carpet tile's noise reduction qualities. At least managers now know there is a middle ground choice when it comes to floor coverings, and one that might prove very worthwhile.

Doug Berjer is the brand manager for [CFR](#), which uses Continuous Flow Recycling technology. He has written extensively on cleaning and water conservation issues.