

Understanding Rubber Floors is the First Step in Maintaining Them Properly

Rubber floors are quite possibly the most misunderstood type of flooring today. In fact, people often don't recognize a rubber floor when they see it. Yet rubber flooring materials are showing up more and more in schools, sports arenas, gyms, elevators, lobbies and airports, among other areas.

Facility managers choose rubber surfaces because they look good and are considered a "low-maintenance" surface. However, not all rubber floors are the same, so it is important for cleaning crews to understand the material in order to maintain it properly and prevent costly mistakes.

Rubber: An Introduction

The most common types of rubber floors found in commercial and institutional facilities today are studded rubber, rubber sheet, poured epoxy mix, & rubber, and recycled rubber floors. It is important to know that some types of rubber floors age over time.

As a rubber floor ages, its surface will become harder. This natural process creates a surface that becomes easier to keep clean. During the initial 6 to 12 months following installation, the rubber surface will more readily scuff and attract soil. It is important to properly treat rubber floors from the start in order to eliminate many cleaning complications later on.

Newly installed floors should be treated with a protective coating to prevent scuffing and to prevent dirt from becoming imbedded permanently into the floor. Before applying the protective coating, rubber floors must be scrubbed to remove the factory coating and migrating waxes that rubber floors often have so the protective coating can adhere to the surface. Elements Neutral pH Stripper works best to remove manufacturing residues such as mold releases, paraffin, etc. After initial scrubbing, the facility can apply a coat of Elements Synthetic Floor Protectant. Elements Gloss Restorer may also be used as a daily cleaner on both finished and unfinished rubber floors.

Maintenance Matters

Certain types of rubber floors require special considerations. For example, floors made from recycled rubber materials are very porous and requires a sealant. Recycled rubber must be cleaned with vacuums and auto-scrubbers using microfiber pads because the surface is very rough and holds onto dirt and particles. It is important to remember that different rubber floors, especially gym floors

Using auto-scrubbers with microfiber pads/contact pads work best on textured and studded floor surfaces because the microfibers are able to grab dirt from uneven surfaces. Avoid putting floor finish on studded and textured rubber floors. It is difficult achieve proper adhesion or to strip on the uneven surface.

In addition to these special considerations, there are certain products and procedures to avoid when it comes to rubber floor care:

- Avoid using alkaline detergents on rubber. Alkaline detergents will cause some types of rubber floors to dry out or "bleed." Bleeding causes the floor to lose its color.
- Do not apply more than two coats of finish on soft rubber floors. More than that could crack and peel.
- Avoid using caustic and high-pH strippers. Use special low-pH strippers with a pH of less than 10.5.
- Avoid applying conventional floor finishes to textured or studded rubber floors, as the finish will crack and peel from the floor.
- Avoid too many coats of floor finish. This will turn the floor to a surface similar to plastic, taking away the soft quality people choose rubber floors for in the first place.
- Do not burnish floors with high-speed burnishers because they could cause burning, scalping or melt floor tiles.

When cleaning and maintenance problems or issues occur, contact the floor manufacturer for instructions.

