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Crystal Clean Carpet Care

By Dennis Jurecki — posted 08/01/2007

Spring is here, and with it comes spring-cleaning. This usually means throwing out anything that looks old or faded—but wouldn't it be nice if you could inform your facility service provider customers that those gray, worn-out looking carpets may not, in fact, need replacing?

The use of an encapsulation cleaning method can help older carpet look like new. And knowledge on the subject is a good way for distributors to ensure that their customers continue to view them as a valuable resource.

Encapsulation Defined

According to a study conducted by the Hoover Co., 79 percent of the soil found in carpets is dry, or loose, soil, which means it can easily be removed through vacuuming. The remaining 21 percent is either a wet or a sticky soil, and this is where encapsulation comes in.

Encapsulation is a newly established, low-moisture carpet-cleaning process designed especially for high-traffic commercial carpets with moderate to heavy soiling. It works by using a specialized carpet-cleaning machine with an encapsulating detergent. The agitation of the machine, along with the detergent's chemical properties, quickly breaks the bond between the soil and the carpet fiber. The crystallizing polymers from the detergent surround the soil particles—hence the term “encapsulation”—preventing them from reattaching to the carpet fibers.

These crystallized soil particles are then easily vacuumed up. Polymers left behind in the carpet fibers can actually retard future soiling, as remaining crystals provide a light film on the carpet fiber, keeping them from attracting more soil. Routine vacuuming continually removes the crystallized soil particles and as a result, many carpets stay cleaner longer.

Benefits

Time savings. In about 10 to 15 minutes, most workers can be trained to treat large amounts of commercial carpet with professional results. A productivity rate of 2,000 to 3,000 square feet per hour can be achieved with the right mix of machine and detergent. Carpets also can be put back into service promptly, as this low-moisture method dries faster than traditional wet extraction—from 30 to 90 minutes without assistance from air-moving equipment.

Cost savings. A gallon of encapsulation detergent properly mixed and applied cleans an average of 4,800 square feet. That translates into chemical costs of less than one cent per

square foot. Couple this information with the 2,000 to 3,000 square-foot-per-hour productivity rate and the cost-savings benefits from using encapsulation become obvious.

Wicking prevention. Wicking is a problem that can occur the morning after a carpet is cleaned, as stains that appeared to have been removed the day before mysteriously reappear. This is because most commercial carpets do not allow for good airflow and trap a large amount of water when cleaned traditionally. Wicking occurs as the carpet dries and “pulls up” or “wicks” any stains below the carpet fibers to the carpet’s top. But because encapsulation is low moisture, it doesn’t saturate the carpet, which prevents wicking from taking place. Encapsulation effectively removes dirt and eliminates stains without the chance of stains reappearing the next day.

Guaranteeing Success

After carefully vacuuming the carpet to remove dry dirt and pre-treating any severely soiled areas, the first way to ensure that encapsulation will work well is to use a carpet scrubber that offers a deep scrub, creating good agitation without harming the carpet fiber. The scrubber should have a three-head, planetary movement or counter-rotating cylindrical brush heads. These machines provide superb agitation while being sufficiently gentle on the carpet. Agitation is important, as the key to productivity and cost savings is that the machine be able to scrub the carpet fibers from all sides in a single pass.

The second way to get a good result from encapsulation is to use a detergent that forms a solid crystal or film when it dries. The detergent should be worked through the carpet fibers evenly. Most products create a pale white foam when used on the carpet, which indicates proper amounts of solution are being applied. Excessive foaming, on the other hand, indicates over-application. The detergent should not be rinsed out of the carpet, as that will actually prevent the encapsulation technology from working. Rather, the carpet should be allowed to dry, and routine vacuuming will remove the encapsulated soil. The carpet is dry to the touch in 30 to 90 minutes, and vacuuming is most productive 24 hours after application. Continued vacuuming of the carpet on a regular basis will pick up more crystallized soil particles.

Most encapsulation detergents also can be used to pre-treat stains. Before the carpet is cleaned via the encapsulation method, a double-strength mixture of detergent and water should be sprayed onto the heavily soiled areas until they are damp. A few minutes should elapse before regular cleaning is begun, but the pre-treated areas should not be allowed to dry, as the extra detergent will help loosen the stains. Remember that before cleaning with the encapsulation detergent is begun, a thorough vacuuming should be done, or the cleaning solution will combine with the dry particles to form mud.

Today, a good encapsulation system can be ideal for commercial-carpet maintenance; it yields fast cleaning production rates, offers a deep clean, and has soil-retardant properties. Add in the lower start-up and labor costs, and it’s a sure bet for any building manager or carpet cleaning professional.

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Harold Jenkinson



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Missing from this report is the fact that all encapsulation processes must incorporate a wet extraction process after the 4th to 5th application. This is necessary to remove the buildup residue left by the

encapsulating chemical. Total removal by the vacuum is not achieved as evidenced by the residual dirt left in the carpet from daily vacuuming before the encapsulation process.

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