

The Lowdown On Cleaning Food-Service Floors

The author provides some insider floor cleaning tips that you can quickly pick up.

By Maurice Dixon

Floor cleaning and, in particular, floor cleaning in food-serving establishments, is an ongoing challenge to every store manager and maintenance crew. Clean, Sanitary and safe floors are important not only for health reasons, but for customer comfort and legal reasons.

Two separate areas need to be addressed: the “back of the house,” that is, food preparation/kitchen, and the “front of the house,” food-serving areas, lobbies, entrances, and restroom floors. In the back of the house, clean floors are important for different reasons than are the public areas where the customers are the inspectors. In order to keep the kitchen floor clean, sanitary and safe, it usually requires different procedures, products and schedules that the other areas. It is especially important from a sanitary and safety standpoint to keep these floors clean.

Studies done by a large supplier of food service establishments report that slip/fall accidents are the largest contributor to the cost of workmen’s compensation in the food service industry. These costs do not take into account the hidden costs of lost time, paper work, hiring and training new people, and lost good will of employees and customers – let alone the serious injury to the employee and the disruption to their personal life.

Many of the floors in food establishments are quarry tile (6-inch square) especially in the kitchen and sometimes extending into the counter area and out into the front of the house. Many fast food establishments have quarry tile throughout the food-serving area as well as the front of the house. Most restroom floors are quarry tile or ceramic tile; occasionally a resilient tile or a seamless floor is used in a restroom.

Quarry tile and ceramic tile floors are “grouted floors,” and the grouting creates additional cleaning challenges.

The causes of slippery floors can be numerous, each of which can be corrected. Let’s take a look at some of the causes.

1. The tile itself becomes worn and smooth.
2. Multiple layers of soil are allowed to remain in the grout and to build up on the floor itself.
3. Inadequate cleaning procedures.
4. Misuse of cleaning products or the use of the wrong cleaning products and tools.
5. Inadequate cleaning frequency (scheduled or unscheduled).
6. Untrained personnel.



Assail those slippery back of the house floors

Let's talk about solutions to various causes of slipperiness underfoot.

1. Worn, slippery floors.

Cover them with matting, but to clean the floor the matting must be removed (it needs to be picked up beforehand and replaced afterward). An anti-slip material can be applied to the floor in strips that are glued to the floor. However, most of these are hard to clean and to keep clean; they are also subject to wear and replacement.

The tile itself can be etched to some degree with mechanical or chemical action. In most cases, this procedure is done by an outside contractor. The etching procedure opens the pores of the floor and, if not done properly, can cause damage to the floor and actually hold more soil and become harder to clean than it was before the procedure was completed.

Food service suppliers offer mats and anti-slip materials, as well as chemical and mechanical methods of helping reduce the slipperiness of these floors.

Soil removal. This soil consists of fats, protein, fatty acids and other soils, including good old mother earth tracked in from the outside. Grout is an issue here. We see soils build up in the grouting and are subject to tracking throughout the entire facility. When grouted floors are mopped, the grouting acts as a wiper blade on the mop head and, in fact, squeegees the soil from the



Grout Clout: This Turbolava equipment does justice to a food service tile floor.

2. mop head and deposits it into the grouting. The use of the proper cleaning detergent, manufactured to emulsify, hold in suspension and properly remove these multiple soils, is a must. All purpose cleaners won't work, vinegar won't work – only a degreaser manufactured for this use, and properly measured into the cleaning bucket or machine, will work.

3. **Inadequate cleaning procedures.** Misuse of cleaning products and/or using the wrong cleaning products or tools is common. In many cases these floors are cleaned manually using a deck scrub and a floor squeegee. The cleaning solution is applied to the floor with a mop, someone is assigned to scrub the floor using a 12- to 14-inch deck scrub brush. Either the same person or a second person is assigned to hose down the floor and use a squeegee to push into the floor drain. This procedure varies in frequency from daily to once or twice a week (come on, folks, this is the 21st

century!).

In between these scrubblings, the floor is wet/damp mopped. This mopping procedure simply spreads the soil around – it deposits some of it into the grouting, and most of it back into the mop bucket to be reapplied to the floor. If this mopping procedure is used, the mop bucket water should be changed every few minutes and the mop itself rinsed out in clean water every time the mop water is changed.

A double bucket mop technique could also be considered. The first bucket contains water and cleaning solution, the second bucket is used to rinse out the mop, so as not to deposit the soil from the floor into the cleaning solution bucket. Mop buckets must be cleaned after each use and the mop head thoroughly rinsed out and hung up to dry, in order to keep these tools clean and well appearing.

4. **Misuse of cleaning products.** It's a fact!

No matter how good your cleaning solution is, no matter how good your mop is, no matter how good your mopping procedure is, and no matter how good your mopper is, or has been trained, you cannot mop a floor clean. The only way to keep floors clean is to scrub them with a vacuum and pour it down the drain. Suggested machines for this use are the following: A single disc floor machine with a penetrating brush that will clean into the grouting, and a wet pickup vacuum for containing solution. Or use a combination machine, one that's a floor machine and a wet vac all in one, which has

two tanks – one for the cleaning solution and one to recover the soiled water.

The size of the area, how open or congested it is, and how much storage the machine has, will dictate the size and type of the combination machine. In addition to this equipment, a scrub brush, a squeegee and a damp mop are also needed. The scrub brush can be used for scrubbing into corners and other hard-to-reach areas. Then use a lightweight 12- to 16-inch window squeegee to bring the soil solution out where your vacuum can pick it up. Use the damp mop for touch-up. In other words, contain the soil – don't just spread it around.

Two other basic, but important points: sweep away the heavy soil before scrubbing; and always use wet floor signs when the floor is wet.

5. Inadequate cleaning frequencies (scheduled or unscheduled). When you mop a floor and spread the soil around you'll have to clean the floor more often than if you scrub and remove the soil.

Most food establishments clean their floors after closing for the day and do some touch-ups throughout the day. Others clean (mop 2-3-4 times a day, due to corporate policy and inadequate cleaning each time). Whatever frequency you feel is needed, when you scrub the floor, contain the soil and pour it down the drain. The floor cleaning task will be easier, quicker and will result in a much cleaner and safer floor.

6. Untrained personnel.

A way of life in most food establishments is the high turnover in help. Unfortunately,

many times the highest rate of turnover is in the very important area of floor cleaning personnel. There are several ways to help train and continue to train personnel for this task. There are videos (bilingual), wall charts, printed materials, step-by-step training procedures and hands-on training that can help train on an ongoing basis.

Suppliers of sanitary products can offer a training service as a value-added service along with the supplies needed to complete the job.

Front of house

Now let's discuss the front of house and some thoughts regarding floor care there.

First, by properly cleaning the back of the house it will reduce tracking of grease and soil into the customer area. If the front of the house is quarry tile or some other "hard floor," in part or total, the same machine scrubbing procedures as used in the kitchen should be employed. If the floor is carpeted, then a proper carpet care program should be implemented.

There are two kinds of soil in carpeting-loose soil and sticky soil. You need to remove both in order to keep the carpet appearance at a high level for customer inspection and to help extend the life of the carpet.

Loose soil and litter can be removed with a small manual carpet sweeper for a quick touch-up (cosmetic cleaning). Heavy traffic areas should be vacuumed more than once a day based on traffic volume. The use of lightweight, one-motor or two-motor upright

vacuums or back packs should be the method for removing loose soil. Spots and stains should be removed daily and, if possible, spills should be absorbed with the use of white towels as soon as they happen.

Sticky soil requires the use of a cleaning solution and some agitation. Bonnet buffing or tip cleaning is an interim technique and is a little bit like mopping a hard floor. It is quick but most of the soil remains in the carpet. So the best method of accomplishing good carpet cleaning is with the use of a carpet extractor. Extracting a carpet is similar to the use of a combination scrubbing machine on hard floor.

It removes and contains the soil, allowing you to pour it down the drain. This task can be done by an in-house staff or an outside cleaning service. Carpet extraction should be scheduled frequently. Carpets go from clean to dingy point before they are extracted.

Restrooms are first-impression areas in any facility, and that certainly is true in a food establishment. Restroom floors of quarry or ceramic tile with grouting are no easier to clean than the floors in a kitchen. The soil is different, but the ease of cleaning is the same. One other problem of improper cleaning in restrooms is odor. Restroom floors, whether or not they contain grouting, should be machine scrubbed and vacuumed on a frequent basis. You cannot expect to have clean and sanitary restroom floors using only a mop.

In addition to these cleaning procedures, the use of track-off mats to help keep floors clean should be considered in the

entry ways, between the kitchen and the cash register, and any other high traffic areas where trackage from one surface to another is evident.

One other idea that will help keep floors clean and free of litter is the proper use of waste receptacles, in other words, the proper placement (where the litter gathers), size and design. These “litter awareness devices” invite the cast of litter in restrooms, entry ways and outside. Do a little research and you will be able to install the proper number, size and placement of these containers.

To recap, for clean, healthy, safe floors in food establishments take a survey.

- Inspect the floor – is it worn or smooth? Does it require some mechanical or chemical treatment?
- Review the cleaning techniques, frequencies, materials and equipment being used.
- Set up an ongoing training program using videos, wall charts, written material and hands-on training that will help new personnel become effective and efficient quickly.

For the owners and managers of food serving establishments that are truly interested in clean and safe floors, there are any number of resources available to call upon for help.

Janitorial, paper and food service vendors keep a large inventory of products and equipment that will address all of the issues noted in this article.

Ask them for their recommendations, and most of all, ask them to demonstrate their products.

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Put your mop and bucket away!



Scrub, contain, and pour it down the drain!
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