



his business. He also found that, although commercial customers may postpone carpet cleaning during the rainy months of the year, he could easily fill that time by stripping, refinishing, and polishing marble, tile, stone, and other hard-surface floors.

Many pressure washing professionals find themselves in a predicament similar to Simler's. During certain periods of the year, such as the snowy winter months or rainy seasons, their businesses virtually go into hibernation and wait to be awakened in spring. But, just as Simler did, adding hard-surface floor care services may be the way to maintain positive income and cash flow throughout the year.

Before jumping into the business of maintaining hard-surface floors, it is imperative to have a good overview of some basic floor care issues, such as these:

- Understanding the different types of floors;
- Evaluating the maintenance needs of a customer's floors;
- Having an overview of the most common floor care tasks;
- Understanding the different types of floor care equipment available.

### Floor Types

Luckily, there are only two basic types of hard-surface floors: resilient and nonresilient. However—and possibly unfortunately for those new to floor care—there are literally scores of different floors that fit into these two categories.

In the commercial setting, the most common floor type is resilient. These floors, as the name implies, are extremely durable, are relatively easy to maintain for the experienced floor care technician, and usually last 10 or more years depending on a variety of factors, such as wear and tear and foot traffic.

These are the most common resilient floors:

- Vinyl composition tile (VCT)
- Vinyl asbestos tile (VAT). The asbestos used in VAT tiles is firmly encapsulated or locked in the product

## Natural Fit for Some Distributors

For distributors selling pressure washing equipment, branching out into floor care, "is a natural fit," says Loren Thoennes of Breco Corporation, a jansan distributor in West Fargo, ND. "We see it as a great opportunity both for our business as well as our pressure washing customers," he says. "And we do find many of our pressure washing customers offering a variety of services today, including floor care."

Thoennes also says that many pressure washing professionals have been purchasing floor care equipment—and offering floor care services—for quite some time. One reason for this, he suggests, is his area of the country, where the more services a contractor provides, the more successful their company, and the better able they are to adjust to seasonal impacts on their businesses.

Thoennes adds that his company sells mostly janitorial equipment and not chemical supplies or paper supplies. This helps him specialize in equipment sales, large and small, so that his customers know they can turn to him for help, product knowledge, and instruction on a variety of cleaning tasks, including floor care and pressure washing.

However, the same does not necessarily hold true in other parts of the country. Emo Moschini, a Chicago-based distributor of floor-care equipment, says he only has one or two pressure washing customers that have expanded into floor care. "Pressure washing is very lucrative here," he says. "There are all kinds of opportunities, from pressure washing sidewalks to entire buildings, and they simply can make more money pressure washing than at floor care."

He adds that the pressure washing companies he knows of that have expanded into floor care are more "full service" type operations already. "They offer a variety of services, with floor care and pressure washing just a couple of them."

during the manufacturing process. It does not become airborne during the lifetime of the product when used and maintained as recommended by the manufacturer.\*

- Vinyl asphalt tile
- Linoleum
- Rubber

On the other hand, nonresilient floors, which are often found in hotels, restaurants, and homes, include these types:

- Concrete
- Marble
- Stone
- Ceramic
- Mexican tile
- Terrazzo
- Slate
- Clay
- Brick

### How Much Is the Floor Worth?

When evaluating the cleaning and maintenance needs of your customers' floors, one of the first issues to resolve is determining how much the floors are "worth" to the customers. This does not refer to the actual cost of the floors, although that certainly can play a part in the decision, but to how much time and money they want

to spend maintaining the appearance of the floors.

For instance, many hotels, class "A" office buildings, stores, and other facilities place a high value on the look of their floors and are willing to spend considerable sums to keep them looking their best at all times. One major American retailer, Target Corporation, insists that the floors in all of their stores always be clean and glossy. The company believes this is not only the image they want for their stores but part of the branding of the company itself.

Once the value of appearance has been determined, other factors affecting the cost of maintenance for the floor must be examined. These include foot traffic conditions in the facility, size of the floor area, and number of obstructions such as partitions, desks, and walls, which can all add time to the cleaning and maintenance process.

### Floor Care Tasks

One of the major differences between resilient and non-resilient



can easily damage a marble floor, and using too coarse a buffing pad can scratch it.

For almost all floors, the three most common floor care tasks include daily, interim, and restorative maintenance. Daily maintenance involves dust mopping or vacuuming to remove dust and dirt on the floor, not only for appearance reasons but to prevent the soil from being ground into the floor surface by foot traffic. Gum should be removed and the floor mopped or machine scrubbed using the correct pads and properly diluted chemicals.

Interim cleaning often requires the use of a floor machine, buffer, or burnisher. It involves using a chemical restorer or spray buffing the floor to remove heel marks and embedded soils and to restore the floor's luster. Interim cleaning may also require deep scrubbing the floor with a buffer or scrubber and then recoating with floor finish.

Because floor maintenance is so labor-intensive, the more thoroughly the daily and interim maintenance is performed, the less

often the floor will need to be stripped, sealed, and refinished—the restorative part of floor care.

Restorative maintenance involves mopping a solvent or alkaline stripper onto the floor, working a small area at a time. After a few minutes of dwell time, which allows the chemicals to start dissolving the old finish, a buffer or scrubber with proper stripping pad is used to deep clean the floor and

remove the old finish. The area is then rinsed and cleaned, often using a wet/dry vacuum to collect the solution. The entire area may need to be rinsed several times to remove not only the old finish, dirt, and grime but also remnants of the stripper.

Once this process is completed, the floor must be inspected. Is the entire surface clean? Has all the finish and stripper been removed? Before applying sealer or new floor finish, the surface must be as clean and dry as possible.

The first coat of finish is applied using a clean, wet mop or floor-finish applicator. This is done with an overlapping figure-eight motion. After approximately 30 minutes of drying time, based on weather conditions and manufacturers' suggestions, as many as three more coats may need to be applied. In most situations, the floor will not begin to shine until the third coat.

#### **Floor Care Equipment**

The first electric-powered floor machines date back to the early 1900s. These machines were made of heavy steel with a rotary disc that could reach speeds of about 175 rpm. With few changes, the same machines introduced more than 100 years ago are still available today.

However, as with so many products in the cleaning industry, new technologies have been introduced that make floor care not only easier but more productive as well. One such is cylindrical brush technology.

According to a leading manufacturer of cylindrical brush equipment, among the differences between the two systems are these:

- Disc machines are round, and the pads rotate horizontally; cylindrical machines are square, and the pads rotate vertically, improving edge-cleaning capabilities.
- Disc machines usually operate at 175 to 250 rpm; cylindrical machines rotate at speeds such as 1400 rpm and have greater "contact pressure" on the floor.

floors involves the care required in maintaining each. Because non-resilient floors tend to be softer and more porous, their maintenance requires a much more thorough knowledge. A pressure washing professional asked to clean a marble floor, for example, should contact a janitorial distributor or even the manufacturer for information about what chemicals and products to use. The wrong chemical

