

Cleaning Grout

By Stan Zimmer

The chemicals and methods used to clean tile and grout while controlling mold and mildew don't have to be dangerous to be effective.

Typical acid-based grout cleaners are efficient but potentially toxic because of their dangerous fumes. They can also damage glass, fabric, carpet, metal and wood if improperly used, and should never be applied to marble.

Acid-based cleaners can burn, or "frost" tile if the chemicals are not removed quickly. Only replacing the tiles or applying a special sealer that optically refracts light, making the tile appear clean, can fix the resulting white burn.

These dangers dictate that only trained and experienced workers be allowed to use acid-based cleaners.

The most effective and safe tile and grout cleaners "float" dirt and grime out of the porous grout without the use of detergents that can harm the environment. These cleaners can be used safely every day to keep tile and grout clean while reducing the likelihood of damaging other materials.

Non-acid cleaners are safe to use on marble and limestone floors, and are equally effective on polished marble, granite, ceramic and quarry tile, concrete and brick. Since fewer other cleaning chemicals are needed, there's less chance of workers using the wrong cleaner.

Mold, mildew and algae control is another area where effective and safe cleaning products are needed.

Most mildew cleaners quickly remove the pesky growth, but it reappears within days because of the chemicals used. Many of the cleaners contain a hypochlorous acid solution that, when sprayed on a surface, vaporizes into chlorine gas that can be inhaled by cleaning workers. These dangerous fumes can also enter and spread through a building's ventilation system.

These same cleaners don't provide the surface stability that could prevent future mold and mildew growth. Mold spores land on the area again and start growing, a condition made worse in damp and humid environments.

Continued exposure to such chemical cleaners can cause health problems in cleaning workers, while the acids may damage treated surfaces and bleach other materials, such as fabric, glass, carpet and metal.

There are technologically advanced products that don't produce chlorine when used but do provide greater surface binding action for better and longer mold and mildew control. They consist of a special blend of mold-resistant compounds and surfactants that penetrate the surface to be cleaned, offer high surface binding action, vaporize slowly and provide residual cleaning action.

As a result, you'll get longer lasting control over mold, mildew and other types of growth.

There's also labor savings since hard-to-reach areas, ceilings and other surfaces won't need such frequent cleaning. The products can effectively control mildew even on polished marble and they won't etch the finished stone.

The technologically advanced cleaners don't contain any ingredients that are classified as hazardous substances by regulatory agencies. It also means the chemicals won't damage delicate fabrics, carpet, metals and plastics, nor will their runoff or spill alter sensitive pH balances, such as swimming pool water.

And there's no acrid, dangerous odors to be inhaled by cleaning workers.

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