

Floor Cleaning Stripping Techniques

Teach your staff these proper stripping techniques.

By Valan R. Martini

Building managers, contractors and others are constantly seeking technical assistance to overcome problems their crews encounter while stripping, finishing or recoating floors.

Sometimes a problem results from the poor performance characteristics of a low quality chemical product purchased to hold down costs, even though the use of a more effective product would reduce follow-up maintenance time and overall costs. Other problems can result from a technician's failure to follow procedures essential to a sound floor maintenance program.

The following guidelines offer step-by-step directions for stripping floors to managers who may find them useful in training, in periodic reviews with supervisors or for inclusion in a procedures manual.

PREPARING THE SURFACE

The first step in stripping a floor is proper preparation of the area to be stripped. Have your staff remove all displays, furniture, equipment and other objects that can be moved. Note the location of each item so it can be replaced properly. Scrape away gum, tape, labels or other debris that may have adhered to the floor, but instruct your crew to carefully scrape debris without gouging or scarring the floor.

Direct your staff to dust mop the entire floor and place caution cones and barricades at each location where it is necessary to prevent traffic from entering the area during treatment. Lock access doors if possible.

Place liquid containment devices, such as water wedges, in doorways and other boundaries separating areas that you do not intend to strip. These non-strippable areas may include carpets, marble, wood or previously finished floors. Have your crew use duct tape and plastic sheeting to create barriers and zones between the work area and areas that are not to be stripped. Follow tile joint lines to create clean divisions between the work area and other areas.

CREW SAFETY

Before beginning work, technicians must be thoroughly briefed on the material safety data sheets (MSDS) for the chemicals being used. Each technician must be completely trained before operating equipment.

Have your crew wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts to prevent contact with splashed chemicals. Eye goggles or face shields and waterproof, chemical-resistant, nitrile gloves should be used. Staff footwear must protect the feet, ankles and lower legs and must be waterproof and chemical resistant. Traction boots are useful and can be removed easily to allow crossing delicate floor surfaces when those are unavoidable.

Direct your crew to place all equipment, tools and supplies near the stripping area. Park equipment on matting to prevent damage to floor surfaces. Have your staff charge all machine batteries fully and check vacuum equipment and squeegees. Tanks on all machines must be empty, power cords must be free of cuts or breaks, and plugs must have three terminals in place.

APPLICATION TECHNIQUES

Stripper solution may be dispensed from a mop bucket, a solution tank mounted on a floor machine or from an automatic scrubber. Instruct your crew to mix the stripper concentrate according to the manufacturer's directions on the label. For unique conditions, first consult the manufacturer before stripping. Hot water aids in the

penetration of the stripping solution but is not essential. Have your staff use a measuring pitcher or metered dispenser to ensure proper mix ratio.

Dirty mop heads in otherwise good condition may be used to apply stripper solution and disposed of later. Because it is impossible to rinse all stripping solution from a mophead, have your crew store all such mop heads to be used again in a secure location so they aren't used for any other purpose.

A new 24-ounce, cotton, cut-end mop head mounted on an appropriate handle must be submerged in stripping solution. Without wringing, it should then be placed directly on the floor. Instruct your crew to flood the floor with stripping solution but warn them of the slippery conditions created. Allow the solution to begin drying for at least 10 minutes, but do not let the solution dry completely before scrubbing the floor. If the solution does dry, reapply it and wait for another 10 minutes.

STRIP IN STAGES

Large floor areas should be stripped in stages to maintain control over the process. Scrub the floor with a machine mounted with a stripping pad or brush. A splash guard fitted around the machine will prevent solution from spraying on walls and fixtures. Have the machine operator move the scrubber across the floor in sweeping, overlapping strokes. Scrub in one direction, then reverse to ensure total coverage.

When using an automatic scrubber, the operator should walk slowly behind the unit, doing a double pass over all areas with the squeegee up and the vacuum off. To remove old finish from floor edges, corners and baseboards use equipment such as a hand scrubbing pad or baseboard or edge brush with a high performance stripping pad.

Have your crew scrub wet areas twice, then check along the floor edges and areas where finish was especially heavy to ensure that all finish has been removed.

COMPLETION TEST

To determine if all finish has been removed, pull back the solution with a water wand squeegee. Slide a putty knife several inches along the floor, pressing firmly but taking care not to gouge the floor, if white or blue jelly appears on the blade edge, the floor finish has not been completely removed. Your crew must scrub again.

When all areas check out, instruct your crew to remove the stripper solution with a wet/dry vacuum or automatic scrubber. Immediately after removal of the dirty solution, flood the floor with clean water. Have your crew remove the rinse water with a vacuum or scrubber, then repeat the rinse process. Search once more for patches of leftover finish and remove any remaining finish with a putty knife or scrubbing pad.

FINAL TOUCH-UPS

Crew member(s) responsible for the finishing touch should immerse a fresh cotton mop head in clean water in a clean bucket and wringer. Thoroughly saturate the mop head, then ring it thoroughly dry. Using sweeping strokes, erase any squeegee or dry solution marks on the floor. Any remaining marks or lines can be removed with the hand scrubbing pad.

Direct your staff to clean all equipment and remove it from the stripping area if possible. Thoroughly wash mop buckets, wringers and mop handles to remove all residue. Instruct your crew to rinse mopheads to be saved and press them in a wringer before storage. Remove all liquid containment devices (wedges) and border masks (plastic sheeting), being careful not to let solution drain off the masking items onto any part of the floor.

Because you won't have another chance to erase stripping-solution marks after finish has been applied, have

your crew make one more thorough inspection of the floor, paying close attention to any solution that may have been left underneath baseboards. Use a wet mop to clean up any solution remaining along the border areas, applying it to all of the affected surface. Once you are satisfied the floor is entirely clear of old finish and is thoroughly dry, have your crew begin the finishing process.

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