



Achieving the wet look

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An A to Z guide for achieving high-shine floor finishes.



When it comes to maintaining vinyl composition tile (VCT) or vinyl asbestos tile (VAT), there are three areas to consider—preparation, application and on-going maintenance.

It's difficult to tell the difference between VCT and VAT by looking at the floor, but it's important at the outset of a project to find out which type of floor is being cleaned.

Either talk to the owner or facility manager or look for some boxes of tiles or a set of floor specifications.

You must adhere to a host of federal regulations if working on VAT.

The United States Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) states "deep stripping" with an aggressive pad should not be performed and that adequate amounts of floor finish on the floor should be maintained.

Product Purchase Preparation

Congestion of the area should be a major factor in your choice of products, such as:

- Cleaners
- Floor Finishes
- Equipment
- Miscellaneous Other Items

If working on a floor that has been maintained for a while, consider a few issues:

- What product or type of product is on the floor?
- What condition is the floor in, from little or no finish to excessive amounts of finish with buildups around the edges and obvious amounts of dirt under numerous coats of finish? ("Finish" means synthetic floor finish, not a wax.)
- What type of traffic will the floor handle?
- What type of soil will be tracked in? Is it sand, normal dirt, industrial and oily soil?
- Is there proper protection at the entryway to help stop incoming soil?

You have a choice of a heavy-duty floor stripper with a pH of 11 or so, or a mid-range all-purpose cleaner with a pH of 8-9. Don't use a neutral cleaner (pH of 7) for this kind of work.

Traffic is what abrades the floor finish off the floor; don't keep applying finish where there is no traffic.

Picking Equipment

A single disk rotary floor machine sized to the area, probably a 17-22 inch machine, in combination with a wet pick up vacuum, will work well on a typical job.

In some cases, a propane machine for stripping might be necessary. For floors that aren't in very bad shape, a battery-

powered, walk-behind scrubber might do the deep scrub/strip job.

When choosing a floor pad, consider:

- A so-called high-productivity pad, which is very aggressive for deep stripping (not to be used on a VAT floor)
- A regular stripping pad or a scrubbing pad, if the floor is in reasonably good shape.
- A heavy duty stripper and aggressive pad for a very bad floor with buildup and multiple coats of floor finish.

You may have to scrape the edges and dig out the corners in this situation.

Rinse woes away

Once you have completely removed the existing floor finish, thoroughly rinse the floor and use a neutralizer on the first rinse and plain water on the second rinse.

Be sure to use a "neutralizer" and not a "neutral cleaner."

In the case of recoating a floor that has the same product on it that is being re-applied, scrub the floor with an all-purpose cleaner with a less aggressive pad and leave a base coat.

This allows you to lay fewer coats than if you have deep stripped and saves time.

Application Procedure

You can apply floor finish to get the wet look with a few different tools, such as:

- A wet mop—synthetic, not cotton, sized medium to large (24-32 ounces)
- An 18-24 inch flat mop
- A backpack system or a floor finish applicator that is pulled along while dispensing finish and spreading it with a dust mop type of applicator.

Many floor finishes dry to an excellent shine and level well. In some cases, new leveling agents allow much faster drying time than in the past.

Floor finish formulas also allow for a high solids content—solids in the high 20 to low 30 percent range allow fewer coats and reduced application times.

Because maintenance costs are high for wet look floors, choose the best and easiest to maintain floor finish available for this phase of your operation in order to keep your labor hours to a minimum. If uncertain about what product to use, try a procedure called “Isolate to evaluate.”

Maintain the Wet Look

An ongoing maintenance program must be established based on several factors:

- Size of area—small and/or congested or wide open?
- Amount of traffic

- Weather
- Budgets
- Time available for work to be performed

A few ongoing maintenance procedures that must be considered:

- **Dust Mopping** - the more often the better. Use a cotton dust mop that is treated or a synthetic mop that is not treated.
- **Wet Cleaning** can be anything from spot cleaning with a damp mop to large, ride-on, battery-powered scrubbers.

In both instances, the size of the tool should be the maximum allowable for the space being served.

- **Spray buffing** provides fairly quick results and a very good shine for small or congested areas, but it’s labor intensive. A 300 rpm or a two-speed (175-300 rpm) machine will cut spray buffing times considerably versus the standard 175 rpm machines.
- **Burnishing** - “Twice the shine, in half the time” was the battle cry when burnishing first appeared on the maintenance scene in the mid 1970’s. It was true then and remains so.

As a note, before you re-coat, remove all of the dust left when burnishing by using a non-treated dust cloth or you’ll ingrain this mate-

rial in the floor finish coats and end up with a very shiny, dirty looking floor.

Burnishers clean, with speed and weight.

Cord electric burnishers have typically seven to nine pounds of pressure on the floor; batter units, 15-18 pounds of pressure and propane units up to 40 pounds.

That’s why propane burnishers should be used wherever possible and safe.

Propane really will get the job done quicker with outstanding results.

Before spray buffing or burnishing, always dust mop or wet clean.

Nice Pads

Selecting the right pads or brushes for the equipment and the right cleaner is also important.

In most cases, there are several choices of burnishing pads.

Spray buffing is easier; usually a red pad works fine. In some cases, brushes can be used.

In any case, discuss this very important procedure with the supplier and particularly with the floor finish supplier.

The best floor finish can perform poorly or even be ruined by using the wrong pad.

When it comes to cleaning the floor, choose a cleaner that won’t damage the finish or the shine, but still does an excellent cleaning job.

- Using a neutral cleaner

and a mild pad (white) when cleaning won’t hurt the finish or shine, but in many cases, it won’t keep the floor clean over a long period of time.

- An all-purpose cleaner every week or so will perform a better job while using the neutral cleaner other times.

Don’t Slip Up

Be sure you discuss the anti-slip qualities of the floor finish with the supplier.

Most finishes aren’t slippery by themselves; however, there are a number of factors involved with a fall.

Foreign material on the floor, a spill of some kind and the shoes of the person that slipped all enter into a slip/fall case.

Be certain of legal coverage by getting some information in writing from the vendors.

This won’t ensure you’ll avoid a lawsuit if someone slips, but taking care of your responsibility through proper documentation of your cleaner, training of your personnel, and being on top of all aspects of your business does help.

