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MARKET PULSE

Matting Should Be Included in Any Floor Plan

Though aesthetics is important, effectiveness is the key for customers

By Lynne Knobloch-Fedders

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The road most traveled is also the most difficult to keep clean. The entryway — the area of a building most often seen, visited, and used by employees and customers — is a high-traffic area that often attracts heavy foot traffic. Because of its frequent use, it is prone to spills, stains, ground-in soil, and wear-and-tear damage.

To keep entryways clean and looking their best, two systems are absolutely essential: an effective, well-placed matting system and a regular, well-designed system of entryway cleaning and maintenance. When one or both of these systems are neglected or overlooked, dirt can accumulate rapidly.

Designing a System

Industry experts recommend a matting system that extends at least 15 feet to 20 feet in total length, starting from the outside of the building and covering the breezeway (space between exterior and interior doors), lobby, and initial sections of the hallway.

“Matting should be sold as a system rather than as individual pieces,” says Patti Lloyd, account manager at Robinson Solutions, a Pickering, Ontario-based distributor. “A piecemeal system just doesn’t do the job as effectively.”

Used as a system, mats can help trap as much as 80 to 90 percent of tracked-in soil. The less dirt that’s tracked in, the less time and effort cleaners spend on carpet cleaning, and the more they can focus their efforts elsewhere.

“Because most of the cost incurred by a facility involves cleaning the dirt once it enters the building, one of the most important things a facility can do is buy a high-quality matting system that traps dirt before it enters the building,” explains Jerry Schmidt, president of Shore Is Clean Inc., a

distributor of janitorial and maintenance supplies.

Steve Boldt, president of the St. Paul, Minnesota-based distributor Ryco Supply Co., agrees. "In our industry, it's very important to make sure soil is contained at the entryway," he says. Because each style of mat is designed to serve a different function, it is important to choose them correctly. "Different customers have different needs," explains Lloyd. "For example, schools have a tremendous amount of dirt that is tracked in from the playgrounds, while an office may not have that much dirt tracked in." In addition, mats used in food-related areas (such as kitchens or cafeterias) may require grease-resistant coatings, whereas "sticky mats" placed in industrial settings are designed to pick up steel filings and grease.

Because matting texture determines how effective the mat will be at scraping off dirt and debris, each entryway area requires mats with slightly different textures.

Typically, the area directly outside the building is covered by a rough textured carpet called "scraper matting." Scraper matting is usually made from polypropylene fiber, an aggressive substance designed to scrub larger particles of dirt off shoes.

If the area directly outside the building is not protected from the elements by an awning or roof, scraper matting will be less effective at its main functions: trapping water and removing soil.

The breezeway is a key area for trapping dirt. "The motion of pulling open a door actually turns your body, and places pressure on your foot, twisting it into the floor," says Gary Clipperton, president of National Pro-Clean, a Dallas-based contract cleaning company that specializes in carpet cleaning. "If you have a walk-off mat in between double doors, you take advantage of this twisting motion to remove dirt."

"Wiper/scraper matting," or transitional matting, is typically placed in the breezeway. This matting is usually made from a blend of polypropylene fibers, and is used to trap remaining dirt. Wiper mats, made of quick-drying olefin or nylon fibers, work best inside the building in the lobby area. Wiper mats are designed to dust and dry the shoe, and trap remaining soil.

A common mistake facilities make is to place a plastic runner at the front door. Plastic runners are only designed to protect carpets from damage, not remove soil. "The minute you step off the plastic runner you need a walk-off mat, because the plastic runner does not pick up soil from shoes," says Clipperton.

Safety First

In high-traffic areas, matting systems should be designed to eliminate potential hazards. "In a high-traffic area it is important to use a low-profile type of mat so that you're not causing people to trip on a mat that's too high," says one manufacturer. "Some mats even come with beveled edging on all four sides to prevent tripping."

To ensure safety, it is also important to make sure the matting is affixed securely to the floor surface. Some mats are manufactured with a vinyl mesh backing that is used to keep it firmly in place, or double-sided tape can be applied.

"A good quality mat can help protect you from liability resulting from accidents," says Schmidt. "Make sure your matting doesn't have corners that fray, or rubber borders that might curl, chip, crack, or turn up — these all create safety hazards."

Distributors should also aid customers in documenting traffic and usage patterns for each facility. "Some hospitals and health-care facilities opt not to put mats outside, where people in wheelchairs and senior citizens may have difficulty navigating them," the manufacturer says. "Also, you need to make sure your mat is low enough so there's enough clearance under the door, allowing it to swing open properly."

The Stronger the Better

Schmidt says durability is one of the most important features for a customer. Matting material ranges in durability. "For example, a rubber mat with a sponge center doesn't last as long as a solid rubber mat," he explains.

Durability is affected by the density of the mat's material, which is measured in ounces per square yard. Density also determines how much moisture the mat will absorb. "A denser mat, like a 60-ounce mat, will be much more durable than a 20-ounce mat," says Lloyd.

Most standard mats come with a one-year warranty, and typically last one season (depending on level of usage). However, some mats used in high-traffic areas are manufactured with extended warranties. For high-traffic areas, the value of higher performance is important; therefore, customers will be well served by purchasing mats with extended warranties over traditional mats that last for only a year or so.

In the past few years, matting manufacturers have also begun to realize that aesthetics is a key factor in purchasing decisions. A new trend each September when new matting products are introduced has been to include mats in a variety of styles, colors, textures, and fibers. "Color selections have gotten a lot better," remarks Schmidt. "We used to sell mats in only three or four colors, but now each line of mats might have 16 color selections and several different patterns to choose from."

But mats should not be purchased based on appearance considerations alone. Though aesthetics is important to any facility manager, performance should still be the main criterion in making a purchasing decision.

Because mats need to be cleaned and replaced often, some facilities have chosen to rent mats rather than buy them. "Rental mats may not be as attractive, but the option to rent mats is convenient," Clipperton explains. A linen service may pick up the mats and replace them as often as once per week.

The Importance of Upkeep

For proper maintenance, mats should be vacuumed daily and cleaned with a carpet extractor periodically. Many cleaning employees ignore another essential part of cleaning entryways: the floor beneath the mat. "If the floor under the mat is not cleaned and swept frequently, moisture and dirt can become trapped under the mat, discoloring the floor," one manufacturer reports.

To keep high-traffic areas clean, Clipperton recommends scheduling more frequent cleanings. "The building doesn't soil equally throughout," he says. "Soil accumulates more rapidly within the first 20 feet of the entryway, and also in high-traffic areas such as around elevators and reception desks." He estimates that high-traffic areas may have to be cleaned up to two to three times more frequently than other areas of the building.

Because entryway areas are so frequently used, cleaning schedules must be carefully planned to avoid interfering with regular traffic patterns. "Typically you are confined to cleaning high-traffic areas during off hours or on third shift," Clipperton says. "However, you may be able to clean one half of a

hallway or entryway at a time if you put up cones to direct traffic to the other side.”

He also recommends using air handlers, or blow-dryers, to cut the drying time. “Because hot-water extraction requires an extended drying time, if the mat isn’t dry on time it can cause problems in high-traffic areas,” Clipperton says. “Using air-handlers or blow-dryers can cut drying times in half.”

Some facilities buy a second set of mats and replace soiled mats with clean ones when it becomes necessary. The soiled mats are then cleaned off-site, away from areas that sustain a high volume of foot traffic.

Some buildings have redirected traffic if necessary. “If the building is a larger one, you can direct deliveries, equipment, or other personnel to come in using a back entry area,” Clipperton suggests. “That way, you can reduce the traffic, soil, and damage to your front entryway.

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