

Cleaning and Maintenance

Maintaining the appearance and characteristics (especially slip resistance values) of floor tiles is achieved with the implementation of a suitable cleaning regime. It must be stressed that the cleaning material manufacturer's instructions must be followed at all times. Regular and correctly undertaken cleaning should maintain a flooring product as close to its original state as possible. Incorrect or infrequent cleaning will adversely affect the properties of the flooring material and increase potential hazards.

Generally, the smoother the surface of the tile the easier it is to clean. However, it should be noted that textured products, required to give adequate slip resistance when wet, can be satisfactorily cleaned – the cleanability of a surface is more a function of the contaminant than the texture of the surface. It is therefore essential when selecting and specifying a floor finish that the use of the area and likely contaminants, safety, aesthetic and hygiene requirements are all considered at the specification stage.

Cleaning can be split into several categories, each of which is dependent upon installation type (i.e. wet barefoot areas, shopping malls, public toilets, etc.) and frequency of usage (i.e. high, medium or low traffic):

Builders Clean

This should be undertaken before a floor is being brought into service. The builders clean removes any residual film leftover from the grouting operation and is a one-off cleaning process. This must be carried out as any grout residues left behind will act as a key for dirt resulting in the installation being difficult to clean. Temporary sealers may be used to facilitate cleaning off after laying which can be removed with the use of alkaline detergents.

Cementitious Grouts

The use of a mild acid de-cementing solution followed by thorough rinsing will remove all but the most stubborn of cement residues.

Epoxide Grouts

It is essential that ALL residue must be removed from the surface of the tiles during the grouting process and before the resin cures. Failure to achieve this will result in a very difficult and expensive process using gel-type epoxide removers.

Routine Cleaning

The regular use of detergents or other cleaning agents, which are excessively acidic or alkaline could cause irreversible damage to the ceramic tile surface. Degreasing agents that contain wax, sodium silicate or other additives which leave sticky deposits and thus retain dirt should be avoided. Oil residues or build-ups of wax can be removed with a proprietary wax and polish remover.

Manual Cleaning

In normal conditions tiles require little maintenance and can be easily kept clean by sweeping and then mopping with warm water to which a neutral or nearly neutral detergent has been added. The cleaning solution should remain on the floor for 5 to 15 minutes (see manufacturer's instructions) to allow it to penetrate and emulsify the dirt after which it should be removed by

rinsing thoroughly with clean water. The rinsing process removes the dirt, so the use of clean water is important.

Mechanical Cleaning

For larger floor areas or areas of textured tiles the use of a rotary scrubbing machine is recommended (machines should not be used at speeds in excess of 450rpm). The choice of brush type is very important. Union mix brushes are suitable for light washing and scrubbing, polypropylene brushes are suitable where dirt deposits are especially heavy. The cleaning solution should remain on the floor for 5 to 15 minutes (see manufacturers instructions) after which a secondary scrubbing action and clean mop or suction should be undertaken to remove the solution and dirt.

High Pressure Cleaning

Tiles seldom require the use of high-pressure cleaning. Whilst the process will not damage the tiles care must be taken to avoid erosion of the grout. To minimise grout erosion ensure that the water beam is continually moved from side to side and not allowed to concentrate on the grouted joints. Water containing abrasives or steam cleaners should not be used on ceramic tiles.

Wet Areas

Wet barefoot areas may attract build-ups of body fats, soaps, oil residues and organic growth. To prevent these a mildly acidic cleaning agent used regularly is preferable. If build-up has been allowed a preliminary deep clean with a proprietary cleaner is required followed by regular use of a mildly acidic cleaning agent solution.

Periodic Deep Cleaning

Occasionally foreign matter may cause surface marks that cannot be removed with the usual cleaning processes and materials. If the surface mark cannot be removed, other materials should be considered (it's advisable to experiment on a small inconspicuous area):

Paint - Paint Remover

Organic Stains - Bleach / Washing Soda

Rust - Masonry Cleaner

Oil / Fat / Grease - Detergent or Degreaser

Mould Growth - Bleach / Proprietary Cleaner

Tea / Coffee / Ink - Bleach / Proprietary Cleaner

Abrasive powders or cleaners should never be used on glazed or polished tiles.