



CONSTRUCTION AND FLOORING

by Adam Strizzi

Protecting and Maintaining Gym Floors

Private university administrators may not realize this, but replacing their gym floor can cost upwards of \$100,000. As important as the gymnasium may be to a campus, that same \$100,000 could be used for many other student-related purposes if the gym floor is properly maintained. While gym floors typically need to be scrubbed and coated or refinished at least once per year, it is actually the daily care of the floor that can best help preserve, protect, and maintain the floor and help keep it looking its best.

Protecting Investment in Flooring

Protection is a key word because when it comes to floors of all types—but especially gym floors, which are often used for everything from sporting events and gym classes to concerts—it means an extended life for the floor. And the way we protect floors is by preventing soils, moisture, debris, and what we can call plain old “grit” from being walked onto the floor.

Why are these contaminants so harmful? First of all, moisture left sitting on a gym floor, typically made of hardwood, can seep into the floor, discolor the area, weaken the floor material, and even cause mold to develop. Yet it is the dry soiling that is typically the most harmful. Let’s say some very small pieces of grit are walked onto the gym floor. Now everyone who walks over that grit is scratching it as if with sandpaper or pounding the grit into the floor. This is how gym floors begin to lose their appearance and their protective floor finish, and it can result in permanent damage to the floor.

So how do we prevent this and protect the floor? There is really only one option and that is the use of high-performance mats. According

to ISSA, the worldwide cleaning association, 1,000 people walking into a facility can track approximately 24 pounds of soil onto the floor. While the numbers can vary depending on which study is referenced, in general a high-performance matting system can reduce this number by the following amounts:

- Six feet of matting placed at the entrance to the gym floor can reduce the amount of soil by about 40 percent.
- Twelve feet jumps this figure up to an 80 percent reduction.
- More than 20 feet of high-performance matting could mean a 90 percent reduction in soil.

Before moving on, we should clarify a couple of things. First, let's explain "high-performance" mats. High-performance mats are typically floor mats that are purchased—not rented—from either a distributor or an online source. They are called high-performance because they last longer and, very simply, perform better than other mats. They typically are made of higher-quality fibers, backings, and

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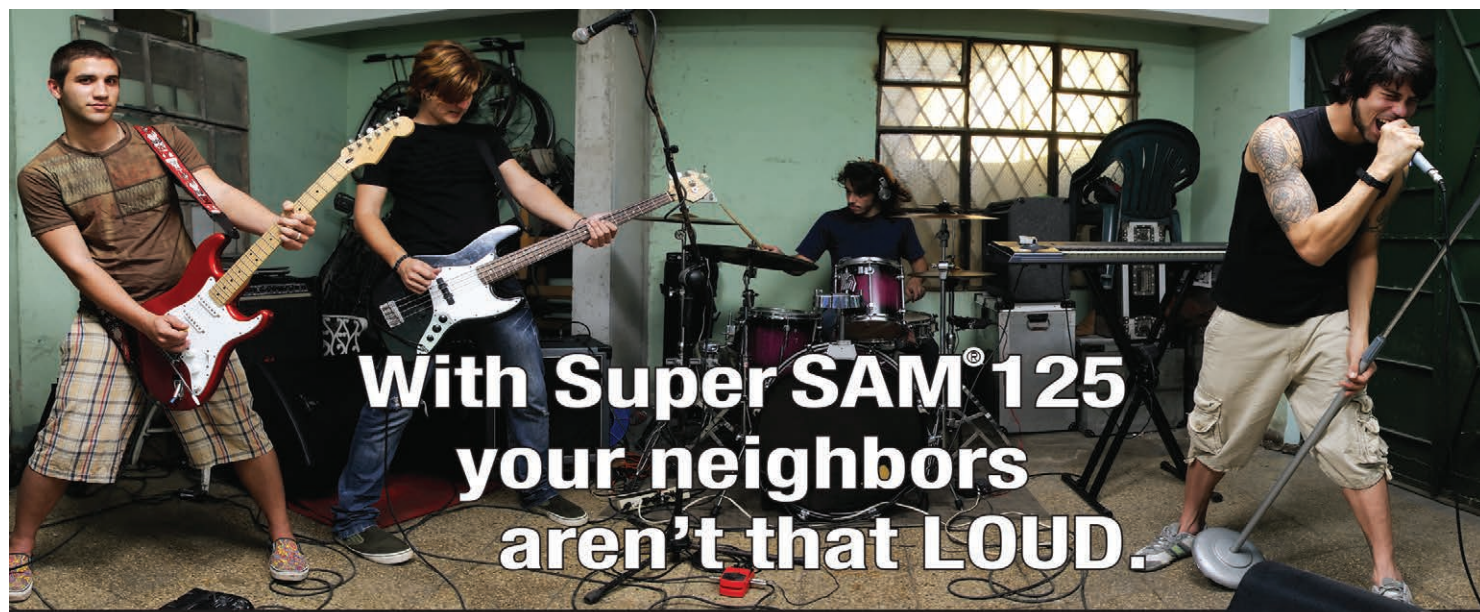
materials that better absorb soil and moisture, preventing it from being walked onto the gym floor. Second, we should point out that mats alone cannot protect gym floors. Exterior areas of the building, especially around entries, should be kept clean and dry. Further, scraper mats should be installed outside entryways so they can scrape grit and soil off of shoe bottoms before building users even walk into the facility.

Maintaining Gym Floors

Along with protecting gym floors from soiling, the next most important consideration is maintaining the floor. While we in

the professional cleaning industry often advise custodial workers not to clean floors with a dust mop, chiefly because dust can become airborne, which can be potentially harmful to the cleaning worker and building users, dust mopping is one of the most effective ways to maintain a large gym floor.

Dust mopping should be performed each day the gym floor is used, and if it is heavily used throughout the day, it likely should be dust mopped two or more times per day. Some private schools, to help mitigate costs, have employed students to take on this task on a rotating basis.



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Ask yourself, “Do we want to spend money on flooring or on our students?”

Following these strategies can help private universities use financial resources in many other ways than replacing a gym floor. Daily and ongoing maintenance is key. View your gym floors as a living, breathing investment. The better you take care of it, the more dividends it will pay you in cost savings.

The floor also should be lightly damp mopped. Use a pH-neutral cleaner—sparingly—and instead of a traditional spaghetti mop, use a microfiber mop. We want to avoid using too much chemical on gym floors because it can dull the floor and remove some of the finish. And a microfiber mop head has been shown to provide superior cleaning using less cleaning solution and moisture. As mentioned earlier, too much moisture on gym floors can cause serious damage. Custodial workers, or students if hired, should check the mop on a regular

basis as it is used. It will begin to discolor with use and should be replaced before it appears overly soiled. The more soiled it becomes, the less effective it will be. Fortunately, microfiber mops can be washed in a conventional washing machine scores of times before they lose their effectiveness. On that note, when washing microfiber mop heads or any type of microfiber, use hot water and a “full cycle” wash to help kill bacteria or germs that have collected on the fabric. Do not wash any other items when washing microfiber. It can collect fibers from

other materials that can damage the microfiber’s effectiveness. Bleach can be used but it will shorten the life span of the fiber. Do not use fabric softeners.

Conclusion

In the end, you should ask yourself, “Do we want to spend money on flooring or on our students?” Following these strategies can help private universities use financial resources in many other ways than replacing a gym floor. Daily and ongoing maintenance is key. View your gym floors as a living, breathing investment. The better you take care of it, the more dividends it will pay you in cost savings.



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