



Carper Stains

If you can't prevent them, here's how to clean them.

By Todd Luyk

"The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining," President John F. Kennedy once said. Facility and cleaning managers who apply the same principle to carpet care and maintenance may find that treatment of carpet stains and spills can mean the difference between carpet survival and its premature replacement.

Some stains can actually be prevented with a few basic protective measures:

Locate barrier mats in or near office entrances, hard surface-to-carpet walkoffs, cafeterias, pantries, and soda and coffee machines. Mats can absorb many spills and stains as well as the seasonal effects of foot traffic. Obvious areas for spills, such as pantries and kitchens, shouldn't be carpeted anyway, since hard surface cleanup is easier.

Make sure all trash cans are reinforced with plastic liners. Too often, half-full soda cans, unfinished lunches and other wet residue can seep into carpet or spill while garbage is emptied by cleaning workers.

Encourage use of lids on all coffee cups to reduce the risk of spills as workers move between coffee machines and their offices. Coffee stains on carpet are one of the biggest problems in facilities today.

Limit food to designated areas by discouraging employees from eating at their desks or in their offices and work areas. Transform lunchrooms or cafeterias into appealing places to eat and socialize.

This decreases the risk of spills and stains on carpeted work areas and reduces the chance for bug and rodent infestation in offices.

Identify and Treat

Stains can occur and will despite the best preventive efforts. So, how can cleaning and facility managers minimize permanent damage to carpet?

First, identify the type of stain and treat it with an appropriate spot cleaning method. Accurate identification of the stain is the key to stain removal; without it, the wrong cleaning solution could be used and the carpet permanently damaged.

For example, tar and gum removal requires a non-ozone-depleting product that freezes

the area sprayed, making it easier to chip away the stain. Grease- and oil-based spots require use of solvents, while protein-based stains, including food and blood, need an enzyme-based cleaner to break down the various elements.

In today's modern offices, computer printers and fax and copy machines cause new and troublesome cleaning problems. Toner cartridges often leak during replacement, leaving black soot on the carpet. Never use water to clean toner from carpet because it only spreads and imbeds the stain. Instead, vacuum the affected area immediately and treat residue with a dry carpet cleaner.

After stain identification and spot cleaning processes, neutralize the affected area and promote long-term maintenance of the carpet. If an outside contractor is responsible for carpet cleaning and maintenance, make sure the contractor is certified by a professional association, or supported or recommended by the carpet manufacturer. Also, let the contractor know about recent stains and cleaning processes that were used.

STEPS TO STAIN REMOVAL

Here are some guidelines that can help in quick and effective stain removal.

Timing is everything. The sooner the stain is treated, the better the chances for its complete removal. The stain is more difficult to remove the longer it's allowed to set in the carpet.

Flush stains with water or club soda. Flood the stain with club soda immediately after the spill happens or is discovered; the carbonation will help bring the stain to the surface and dilute it.

Blot that spot. Blot the stain with a dry cloth, applying pressure straight down into the stain. Avoid rubbing the stain with the cloth since the back-and-forth motion can cause it to spread.

Least aggressive cleaners and methods are best. If the stain's composition can't be identified, begin cleaning with the mildest, least damaging spot cleaner. Work up to a heavier spot removal chemical if the least aggressive methods aren't effective.

Avoid using high-pH products. High-pH products can leave behind a residue that, while invisible to the naked eye, can promote premature carpet re-soiling. No matter what type of spot cleaner is used, make sure a neutral-pH product is applied after the stain is removed.

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