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[Carpet Care]

Orbital Floor Machines Can Be Used For Interim Carpet Cleaning

By Kassandra Kania

Orbital floor cleaning machines are most commonly used to strip finish from hard floors. However, many building service contractors are realizing the benefits of using this equipment on carpeting as well. In addition to saving money on new equipment purchases — the same machine can clean both hard and soft flooring — orbital floor machines produce a better end result in less time, and carpets stay cleaner longer.

“The use of orbital action machines for commercial carpet maintenance, both as an interim and restorative cleaning system, has risen drastically in the last couple of years,” says Craig Jasper, chairman of the Institute of Inspection Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IIIRC), headquartered in Vancouver, Washington. “They are extremely fast at cleaning lightly soiled carpets at rates of up to 5,000 square feet an hour.”

Interim Alternative
Because orbital machines excel at cleaning the surface of carpet fibers, they are best suited for interim cleaning between deep cleaning extractions.

“Extraction is time consuming,” says Dan Houle, president of Regent Supply in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. “With orbital machines, the idea is you’re trying to extend out those extraction times as long as possible, and never let your carpet get really dirty. For example, if you’re extracting every six months you could use the orbital machine every three months and extract once a year. So, it will extend the life of your carpet and the savings to a building is massive.”

Likewise Tom Tipton, owner of 4 State Maintenance in Coffeyville, Kansas, attests to the labor-savings benefit of cleaning carpets with orbital floor machines.

“Ultimately the machine abrades or agitates the surface that it’s cleaning,” he says. “So in high-traffic areas where there’s a tremendous amount of ground-in soil, the orbital machine can greatly benefit the effort. It expedites the process of cleaning. If you didn’t have that form of agitation you’d have to run the extractor over the area a number of times, which lengthens the cleaning process and is costly to the consumer because of the extra labor involved.”

In addition to being labor-intensive, extraction can often lead to oversaturated carpets.

“In high-traffic areas with heavy soil loads, people often over-wet the carpet when trying to remove the soil by extraction and damage the carpet fibers,” says Tipton. “But with the

ORBITAL EQUIPMENT PRODUCT SHOWCASE

SQUARE SCRUB — The EBG-20/C Floor Preparation Machine combines slotted removable weights with a 3450 rpm/69 decibel motor. The machine can re-surface VCT, tile and grout, gym floors, carpet, hardwood, marble, terrazzo, concrete and other flooring types. The product has earned the CRI SOA for Deep Cleaning.

ADVANCE — Including a 28-inch scrub path with dual 14-inch scrub pads, the SC750 REV autoscubber removes floor finish without using chemicals. The scrubber can run continuously for up to 210 minutes in low moisture settings. The product is useful in healthcare, educational, retail, commercial and government facilities.

BETCO CORP — When equipped with a maroon surface prep pad, the Crewman Orbital Strip Machine uses a 3,400 rpm motor to cut through multiple layers of floor finish in just one pass. The machine can also be equipped with sand screens to quickly abrade and level wood floors or gymnasiums without leaving unsightly swirl marks. Models are available in 20- or 28-inch head sizes.

WINDSOR — Taz with Orb Technology is an all-surface machine that works on carpet, stone, tile and grout, wood, vinyl, concrete, epoxy and other surfaces. The orbital machine can be used for low-chemical carpet encapsulation, chemical-free striping, stone refinishing, wood refinishing, and general floor cleaning.
Orbital machines work well for areas where janitors don’t have a lot of time to let carpets dry

"You have to use water and cleaning chemistry to assist in the flushing of the fiber," says Tipton. "So it doesn’t replace extraction, but it does decrease the labor involved by preparing the soil load to be removed and removing a portion of it."

Jasper, on the other hand, believes that orbital equipment can also be used for restorative carpet cleaning purposes, in some cases replace extraction — thanks in part to advances in chemical cleaning agents.

"Hot water is still needed if you have contaminants like urine, but many cleaners use orbital machines to replace hot water extraction," he says. "It’s easy to use, low-moisture, has extremely fast dry times and does a good job of cleaning and removing all the soil. And the cleaning agents that are used help the carpet stay cleaner longer."

Improvements in the orbital machine’s design, along with advancements in encapsulation cleaning agents, have contributed to the machine’s popularity among commercial cleaners.

"You spray the liquid onto the carpet so you’re misting it lightly, not soaking it," says Houle. "The encapsulation chemical is designed to encapsulate and pull soil to the surface. Then you run the machine over the top, and it pulls all the soil into the [pad]."

Orbital machine design differs from manufacturer to manufacturer, says Jasper. Some equipment cleans by agglomeration, where the cleaning solution causes the soil to clump together into large particles. Other machines have more head pressure and use an absorbent pad to lift away soil.

The machines with more head pressure and an absorbent pad are not as fast as the ones that use agglomeration, says Jasper, mainly because the pads have to be changed more frequently as they become soiled. But the end result is the same — carpets are free of soil and stay cleaner for longer.

Keeping Up Appearances
The latest cleaning agents not only remove more soil from carpets when used with orbital floor cleaning machines but they also improve the appearance of the carpet.

"The encapsulation cleaning agents help fill in micro-occlusions in the carpet fibers, making them look more vibrant while coating the fiber with the protector that helps resist soiling," says Jasper.

Conventional bonnet machines can potentially damage the carpet and therefore void carpet manufacturers' warranties. Orbital equipment, however, does not cause carpet fibers to fray and are approved by the Carpet and Rug Institute.

"Rather than using a rotational machine that swings back and forth, you’re just vibrating on the surface," says Houle. "So theoretically you’re not pulling the fibers as much."

Using the oscillating action of the machine alone can improve the carpet’s appearance.

"The orbital movement actually leaves the carpet pile standing straight up," says Schneringer. "So it’s something that helps to do a pile-lifting job, especially in areas where you have a traffic pattern going in a certain direction. It helps to smooth that out."

Kassandra Kania is a freelance writer based in Charlotte, North Carolina.