

PORCELAIN & CERAMIC

Cleaning & Maintenance Guide



Vedere.

www.vedere.com.au
1300 697 033
info@vedere.com.au

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STONE. TILES. FURNITURE.

General Care

There are generally three stages of tile cleaning. The installation cleaning should incorporate removal of excess adhesives and grouts resulting only in a light haze remaining on the finished surfaces (see Clause 5.8). There is usually a need for post installation cleaning that will remove any building soiling including plaster, paint, etc. Routine maintenance will provide a cleaning regime that should ensure the cleanliness and safety of the floor while maintaining the integrity of the tiling system.

Understanding the nature and requirements for a particular floor are key to its performance and service life. This will vary according to the type of tile and any treatment applied to protect or enhance the tile, e.g., pre-sealing, waxes, grout release agents and physical protection layers. An understanding of the surface characteristics of highly slip-resistant tiles will often dictate which cleaning methods should be used.

Damage can occur to flooring if incorrect chemicals or methods are used.

Personnel responsible for post installation cleaning and maintenance should be given specific recommendations for cleaning and full information concerning any particular possible risks of misuse.

Routine Maintenance

It is generally accepted that all things require maintenance and ceramic floor finishes are no different. Recent worldwide developments have altered the nature of ceramic floors. Maintenance of these surfaces is fairly easy to achieve where appropriate processes are used. Daily sweeping and washing to remove soiling remains the most basic method.

Daily sweeping or vacuuming is very important to remove loose soil, sand, mud or other forms of debris that collects on a floor. Loose soil provides an abrasive load that can damage glazed surfaces, leaving a hazy or soiled appearance in high traffic areas. These areas soon start looking different to areas unaffected by abrasion, detracting from the bright polished finish favoured by people. In addition to the worn appearance, the cleaning of this area will become more difficult as the surface alters.

Most loose soil and sand can be collected by creating soil traps at the entrance prior to walking onto the flooring. An entry mat should allow sufficient positive contact of both feet prior to entry to remove most of the soil. If animal entry points are used, the same precautions should be taken as a great deal of loose soil will be deposited by the family pet.

Washing the flooring should remove visible soiling where the correct amount of cleaning agent is used. Residual streaks, detergent marks and films can result from use of excessive cleaning agent, detracting from the gloss. Adequate rinsing of the floor or using a no rinse detergent will correct the issue.

Effective cleaning usually can be achieved by normal washing or scrubbing with warm water and a pH neutral sulphate-free cleaning agent. Greasy deposits can be removed with a detergent incorporating an organic solvent or a highly-alkaline detergent (pH >9), but these should be used for only occasional cleaning. It is not recommended to use acidic cleaning agents as it may result in grout attack and cause hazing of glazed tiles.

The occasional use of abrasive cleaning agents can be beneficial but should be restricted to unglazed floor finishes. Abrasive cleaning methods should generally be avoided as they can contribute to excessive wear. Appropriate cleaning agents are available including proprietary abrasive cleaning agents that will not wear or scratch. Appropriate abrasive methods can be used to remove stubborn stains on polished and profiled glazed tiles. It should be noted that regular use of scrub and rinse cleaning machines fitted with abrasive pads, other than the finest grades, is likely to damage the surface of some tiles, and may result in gradual loss of thickness in the wear layer.

When a tile has a profiled surface, the process may differ as soil and cleaning agents tend to build up on the surface. When such profiled surfaces require cleaning, adequate dwell time and agitation is required to dislodge the soiling prior to complete removal. Agitation can be achieved using appropriate cleaning pads or brushes. Such methods will dislodge most forms of soiling including build-up of past cleaning agents and soil that collects in recesses. Steam and high pressure cleaning methods may occasionally be appropriate in some installations.

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Routine Maintenance (Cont.)

It is important to ensure that the cleaning agent is completely removed by a final rinsing with clean water. Household soaps are not recommended as they tend to leave a slippery scum, particularly in hard-water areas.

Apart from normal usage or obvious misuse, surface contamination can arise from the following:

- Efflorescence
- Residual cement film
- Surface sealing materials
- The reaction of cleaning agents with hard water
- Unsuitable cleaning agents
- Overuse of high alkaline detergents
- Flexible additives left on surface areas
- Coloured oxides deposited through grouting
- Moss, algae, leaves stains, bark stains, wood stains, rust marks, pot plant marks and leaching

Efflorescence

Efflorescence usually appears as a white powder on the surface of the tile or joints. It is caused by liquid water carrying soluble salts from below the tile to the surface. When the water evaporates it leaves a powdery residue. If the installation is new, the residue can usually be removed by sweeping or vacuuming the powder away. If soluble salts are cleaned using water or acidic cleaning solutions, some of the salt will dissolve, be reabsorbed and may reappear as efflorescence. Should the problem be persistent seek professional advice regarding continual moisture problems.

Some deposits may react with carbon dioxide forming insoluble compounds that adhere tenaciously to the tile and adjoining surfaces.

Leaching can be mistaken for efflorescence as a white deposit can develop. Leaching can occur when water enters a tiling system dissolving soluble salts in the bedding or where water contains high mineral contents from other sources. Water access and egress is usually gained through faults or cracks, either in the grout or from differential movement cracks in the tiling system. These soluble deposits leave conspicuous drainage marks and are extremely difficult to remove. Prior to removal, the source of water flow must be located to stop water intrusion. Once the source has been repaired, the leaching can be cleaned often using an appropriate cleaning agent.

Residual Cement Film

After a flooring system has been installed, the tiling professional may have left a light cement film on the surface. This film is generally insoluble in water. This can be removed by treatment with appropriate proprietary acid cleaners. The floor should be wetted to saturate the grout, and free water removed before the application of the cleaning agent. It is important that this treatment be followed immediately by the use of a proprietary neutralizing agent or a slightly alkaline solution, followed by a thorough rinsing with clean water.

Other Residual Films

Other films that can be found on the surface of finished tiling include residues from tile protective waxes, epoxy grouting and polymer-modified grouts and adhesives. This film is generally insoluble in water. This problem is best addressed by thorough cleaning immediately after tile installation. These films can be removed by treatment with appropriate proprietary products. Alternatively, specialist guidance should be sought.

THE ABOVE HAS BEEN EXTRACTED FROM THE AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS DOCUMENT AS 3958.1 - 2007 APPENDIX C CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE

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Cleaning Agents or Chemicals

ROUTINE CLEANING

- Stain-Proof Alkaline Cleaner

EFFLORESCENCE, RESIDUAL CEMENT FILM AND RUST STAINS

- Stain-Proof Acidic Cleaner

Dos and Don'ts

DO Always remember to follow the manufactures instructions when using any cleaning products and/or appliances

DO Dust mop floors frequently

DO Use a steam mop for routine cleaning

DO Thoroughly rinse well with clean water and dry the surface after washing

DO Try to clean a small inconspicuous area first

DO Avoid high concentration of cleaning agents for prolonged periods of time

DO Protect your floor if renovating or if there is any construction surrounding the tile area

DO Blot up spills immediately

DO Protect floor surfaces with non-slip mats or area rugs and countertop surfaces with coasters or placemats

DON'T Use cleaners that contain acid such as bathroom cleaners, grout cleaners or tub and tile cleaners

DON'T Use cleaning agents which incorporate wax or polish, as it may result in a build-up of residue over time

DON'T Use bleach as it may affect some silicones

DON'T Mix bleach and ammonia; this combination creates a toxic and lethal gas

DON'T Ever mix chemicals together unless directions specifically instruct you to do so

MORE IS NOT BETTER when it comes to cleaning agents and chemicals

It is very important to call a professional tile cleaning specialist for problems that appear too difficult to treat. On many occasions cleaning contractors are engaged, rather than a tile expert. This often relates to a perceived reduction in cost that may actually turn out to be more expensive in the long run. If an inappropriate cleaning process is used, the result could be disastrous. If the cleaner/contractor that is responsible for cleaning tiles takes the proper steps and precautions when analysing the problem and selects the appropriate process, the tile will once again return its original state.

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