



Mats That LEED

By Christopher Tricozzi

In February 2008, a survey was conducted asking facility managers their understanding of high-performance matting systems. Many of the 120 people that responded were associated with large school districts as well as schools and universities around the country.

One of the most interesting findings was that fully 91 percent said they were aware of the connection between Green cleaning and high-performance matting systems. Most likely, if the same question had been asked just two



years ago, such a large percentage would not have known about the link.

Indeed, some of the most prominent Green advocates in the janitor industry, such as Stephen Ashkin, President of the Ashkin Group and Executive Director of the Green Cleaning Network, have long trumpeted the need for high-performance matting systems. According to Ashkin, facilities should install as much as 20 feet of matting at building entries. And the reason for this is simple: matting keeps soil, dirt, grit, and contaminants outside so they do not negatively impact indoor environmental quality (IEQ).

In fact, matting is now recognized as a crucial component of Green cleaning. And those facilities, new and old, seeking LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification can earn at least 1 point toward the minimum 32 points necessary to be certified just by having an effective, high-performance matting system installed.

A Team Together

To better understand matting and its relationship to Green cleaning and LEED certification, some clarifications are required. First, not all mats are high-performance mats. Rental mats are usually of only fair quality, last but a few months, and are only moderately effective at capturing and trapping moisture, soils, and contaminants and preventing them from entering the built environment.

Also, we need to know what is *not* a Green mat. A mat does not need to be made from specific or recycled materials or be recyclable in order to be Green. Nowhere in the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) LEED certification program or in the Green Seal™ GS-42 Environmental Standards for Cleaning Services is content listed as a requirement. Instead, both organizations simply point to the importance of matting as part of a Green cleaning program, and they suggest a minimum of 10 to 12 feet of high performance matting be installed at all entrances.

High-performance matting is a much higher-quality matting that is designed to last a year or much longer. Some systems have bi-level construction, so that as foot traffic walks over the mat, soil and water fall below the upper surface of the matting, where they are stored until the mat is vacuumed or cleaned. This keeps soils from being transferred into the building. With a conventional mat, once it becomes saturated, the soil and moisture can re-attach to the shoe and be "walked" into the facility, defeating the entire purpose for installing a matting system.

Additionally, we should know that high-performance matting does not involve just one mat but actually three, working as a team to help capture as much as 85 percent of all soils before they can enter a facility. These three mats include:

Scraper Mats: Placed outside of a facility, these mats *aggressively* scrape dirt, debris, and snow from shoes and trap it beneath the mats' surface. They are typically five feet in length and can effectively trap as much as 50 percent of the soil and moisture found on shoes.

Wiper/Scraper Mats: These mats are also about five feet in length, are typically found directly inside a facility, and help remove soils and moisture not captured by the outdoor scrapers. Often buildings with a double-door entry system will place wiper/scraper mats in the vestibule area between the two sets of doors.

Wiper Mats: The last member in the matting team, wiper mats are also about five feet long. They help ensure that the first step taken off the high-performance matting system and onto the facility's hard-surface floor or carpeting is clean, dry, and soil free.

Selection and Maintenance

Facility managers often turn to building service contractors and jansan distributors to recommend matting systems for their facilities. To help make the selection easier, they should recommend mats that:

- Are manufactured by reputable, well-known companies. Some matting firms have been in business as long as 60 years.
- Have extended warranties. Top-quality, long-lasting mats will have warranties for as long as six years. They may cost a bit more initially, but in the long term they are a savings and are much more effective.

- Are from the same manufacturer. Often the three types of matting systems work together best if from the same manufacturer.

Cleaning Makes It Work

All mats must be cleaned and maintained properly in order to work effectively. In some facilities, this might mean vacuuming the matting throughout the day. In others, just once a day may be all that is necessary. It all depends on foot traffic, climate, and other conditions.

Additionally, high-performance mats, especially because they store soil and moisture below the surface, eventually will need to be cleaned. The best option is to clean them using hot-water extraction. This helps remove soils stored below the surface of the matting. Proper cleaning not only helps the mat work effectively but extends the life of the matting system as well.

Some Green experts say they can get a good idea of how healthy a building is by just looking at the front door. If there is a high performance matting system installed at the entry, it's a good indication this facility places the health of its occupants first—and likely it is Green and possibly LEED certified as well.

Christopher Tricozzi is vice president of sales and marketing for Crown Mats and Matting. He can be reached at ctricozzi@crowm-mats.com.

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