

Common Sense Carpet Care



Avoiding the Layers

by
Richard Whittaker

Brian Kepka in his book, "Taking the Mystique out of Carpet Cleaning", makes a very valid point in regard to carpets getting layered with dirt. He writes that a carpet hides dirt until at some point the dirt gets very visible, and at that time, everyone knows the carpet needs to be cleaned. Dirt layers into the carpet over a period of time, and when it is noticeable, we see what Dr. Eric Brown in his book, "Fundamentals of Carpet Care", calls apparent soil. Apparent soil is very visible and usually is the tip of the iceberg as to a carpet's condition.

But, as Dr. Brown points out, there is another type of soil, which he calls real soil; and this is the "killer" soil. Real soil is the actual soil deep down in the carpet, not what we see on the surface. We aren't normally aware of real soil, although you can be sure it's there; and

it's what causes the carpets demise as it gradually builds up.

Most carpets can hold their weight or more in soil. If for instance your office or room is 10 x 15 and carpeted wall to wall, your carpet might weigh 150 lbs. In addition, your carpet can also trap an additional 150 lbs. of dirt, or more. When the carpet reaches this saturation point, you will have a better understanding of the saying, "The carpet has uglified out, it hasn't worn out".

After it has reached saturation, no matter what system you use to clean your carpet, you probably won't get out more than 15% of the dirt that has filled all the crevices. At this point, a seeming cohesion of dirt bonded to dirt and carpet fibers forms an unbreakable bond that can only partially be undone. Do not get me wrong, the 100% layered carpet will look better after cleaning by whatever method used; but, it will not look better for long. The reason is that there may still be up to 85% of layered dirt trapped in the carpet fibers.

Since most of us probably have had experience in cleaning hard floors, a simple analogy might explain what is happening. If you maintain floors by waxing over dirt month after month after month, your stripping job would

eventually be very complicated and time consuming. This, of course, usually doesn't happen because you can see the mess as it develops. But, and this is my main point, *you can't see layering developing in the carpet until it is too late.* And while you will get the wax off the hard surface eventually; you, unfortunately, will not get a large percentage of dirt out of the carpet that you are cleaning, no matter what method you use.

I think we have all heard this saying, "Don't ever clean your carpet until you have to, because you'll have to clean it again real soon". The adage is certainly correct. As near as we can determine, if you let your carpet get dirty until it is filled to overflowing, you can certainly count on cleaning it again very, very shortly.

Another unfortunate truth is that a carpet cleaned repeatedly, using oily, sticky, cleaning chemicals, will probably layer up faster than one that is not cleaned at all. If you leave residues in the carpet you clean, you are promoting rapid resoiling. It doesn't pay to clean your carpet, if you're actually clogging it with gummy residues, etc.

If you agree with these thoughts, you need to determine which are the best equipment and chemicals available to accomplish regular scrubbing/extracting along with vacuuming, so you can start on the program that I am outlining.

Find out and test what is available from the manufacturers of the various equipment; and then, you can make an intelligent decision in regard to your carpet program. Don't buy equipment that takes more time to use than a vacuum, is bulky or heavy, or a back breaker to use; and stay away from chemicals that leave a lot of residue in the carpet, and methods that leave your carpets wet over night and the next day. The equipment you will purchase and use is the key to your success. Don't settle for anything that puts you back into the once or twice a year category of carpet cleaning. You wouldn't buy a vacuum that you wouldn't use daily, so don't think any differently for scrubber/extractors and chemicals. After all, we are in the "maintenance business", not the "restoration business". ●

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