



Hillyard's Technical Service Question Answer Center

Question: Can we use our autoscrubbers on our gymnasium floor?

Answer:

We are often asked if an autoscrubber is appropriate for maintaining gymnasium sports floors. Although the question seems straightforward, the answer is complicated, especially in consideration of the position taken by MFMA of disapproving the use of automatic scrubbers, referred to as “*scrubbing machinery or power scrubbers that use water under pressure.*” Protecting the newly refinished floor from damage due to tracked in dirt, soils and debris can require a large investment of time and resources for the facility, and the use of autoscrubbers to assist in this effort can greatly improve the efficiency and ease of maintaining large floors. The disadvantage for using the autoscrubber lies in the potential for damage to the flooring system and finish if the scrubber is misused or operated under the wrong conditions.

In consideration of the flooring structure, care must also be taken to ensure the cleaning equipment does not exceed the weight limitations of the flooring system. Sleeper systems commonly used for school gymnasiums can show damage from exceeding the weight limitations of their design. Maple flooring can generally withstand up to 750 psi before indentations occur, however, the flooring system may not be able to handle loads of this amount over certain suspended areas for the floor, which could lead to cracking or breakage. Walk-behind scrubbers should rarely be a concern, but larger riding equipment should be checked for their weight specifications prior to use on most wood flooring systems. The newer micro-rider scrubbers offer another option to consider without exceeding weight concerns for the floor.

Newly Sanded / Newly Installed Wood Gym Floors

We do not encourage the use of automatic scrubbers on newly installed wood floors or newly sanded wood floors until the floor has been recoated 1-3 times. The potential for damage to the floor system and wood is at its greatest during the early life of the floor or immediately after sanding, when the amount of protective finish is at its lowest amount. Newly installed floors are often built with functional expansion gaps to allow for the new floor to expand during humid summer months. These expansion gaps could allow moisture from the scrubbing operation to migrate under the floor system and contribute to structural damage. Therefore, for newly sanded floors or newly installed floors, alternative cleaning methods, i.e. the Court Clean System for tacking the floor is preferred.

Older Wood Gym Floors

Once the gym has undergone a few seasons of activity and annual recoating, the use of automatic scrubbing equipment can generally be conducted without fear of damaging the floor or finish. Care must be taken to ensure there is sufficient finish protecting the wood and no excessive gaps or voids is present that could allow the cleaning solution to seep under the floor. If the floor and scrubber are in good condition, the next area of concern is to make sure the proper cleaning solution and pads are selected to minimize excessive wear to the finish. Hillyard's Top Clean, Super Shine All, Tack-It, and Pre-Game, offer good cleaning ability with little risk for damage to the gym finish. Soft pads are recommended, with the preference for using *white polishing pads* over more aggressive cleaning pads. The use of white pads will reduce the risk of creating "micro-scratches" in the finish that can prematurely dull the finish and accelerate the impression the finish is wearing away. The frequency of scrubbing the floor is dependent upon the volume of traffic and soiling with each location, but limiting the scrubbing procedure to once per week will extend the life of the finish while still keeping the floor clean. If the gym is also used as a multi-purpose room or cafeteria, a more frequent scrubbing routine may have to be employed. If the floor is maintained aggressively throughout the day, the scrubbing process can be reduced to once every other week, or limited to game days only to minimize excessive wear to the finish or floor.

Alternative Cleaning Methods

Additional cleaning methods can be utilized for maintaining the gym floor with little risk of damage to the floor, finish, or flooring system. The Court Clean tacking system is an excellent cleaning tool for removing surface soils with little downtime and little drying required to place the floor back into service. The cleaning tool is much better appreciated when demonstrated, as the amount of soil it will remove from a fairly clean floor is astounding. Another advantage of the Court Clean method is the general acceptance of this system by MFMA contractors and mill companies.

Synthetic Sports Floors

The use of automatic scrubbers for maintaining synthetic (non-wood) sports floors is another excellent way to remove tracked in soils and extend the life of the floor. Before beginning a maintenance program on a newly installed or newly renovated synthetic sports floor, be sure to review any warranty information and maintenance recommendations by the flooring manufacturer to ensure the proposed cleaning steps do not void their floor warranty. Once those steps are completed, determine if the floor would be better cleaned through the use of soft brushes or pads, depending upon the surface texture of the floor. Nutra Rinse, Top Clean or Super Shine All work well for removing light traffic soils from these floors. Make sure the type of autoscrubber chosen to conduct this work does not exceed any weight or load limitations for the floor or floor structure.

Summary:

The most important step in keeping the gymnasium floor clean, attractive and in ready condition for sport play is through daily dust mopping coupled with periodic cleaning with Hillyard Super Shine-All. These steps will keep the floor looking its best by removing a variety of soils, grit, and debris, which can lead to premature wearing of the finish system.

Hillyard has had success utilizing autoscrubbers to clean gymnasium floors for many years. A walk-behind autoscrubber not only does an excellent job of cleaning the floor, but also is quick and relatively effortless to operate compared to traditional cleaning methods. *Autoscrubbers should only be used to clean wood floors if they are in good working order with good operating squeegees, there are sufficient layers of finish present, and no excessive gaps are present between the individual boards.*