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Sports, Fitness, & Recreation Surfacing Readiness Initiative

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Introduction

At Ecore, we proudly manufacture performance surfaces in the USA. We design and test our materials to have a positive impact on people's lives while minimizing our impact on the planet. With circular environmental practices in our DNA, Ecore thinks of upcycling and zero waste as more than goals; they are fundamental to our existence. While we are proud to serve a global market, we are also committed to helping our company and our country to rally to be better.

We have broken down our Surfacing Readiness Initiative into three critical areas: maintenance, disinfection and reorganization. These are all areas where flooring can play a key role in creating confidence for the consumer, as sports, fitness and recreation spaces reopen to a new normal.

Flooring and sports surfacing are not only becoming the most critical pieces of fitness equipment, they are also the largest surfaces in a facility that require regular cleaning and maintenance. There is a simple and harsh reality that facilities dealing with the demands of sports and fitness activities have not prioritized floor cleaning and maintenance in the past.

At Ecore, we also build performance surfaces for the everyday champions on the frontlines in health and wellness with our unique flooring products, we can offer the same ergonomic properties of an athletic sport court to hospital flooring that supports a nurse covering up to 10 miles in the course of a daily shift. We understand the people that use our floors; and, as a result offer premium products and services to meet the daunting sanitary expectations of the healthcare industry and the customers it serves.

We believe the new norm will not only force the sports, fitness and recreation market to adhere to the reality of creating more sanitary spaces, but also a new perception of clean that will drive consumer confidence. Shiny, solid, cool, seamless surfaces are all synonymous with "clean" and drive healthcare design and maintenance protocols. Nurses should have the ergonomic benefits of athletic surfaces that athletes demand and athletes should have the hygienic surfaces that nurses demand.

What follows is our prescription for a post-COVID sports, fitness and recreation facility readiness initiative that will inspire customer confidence and trust in the places that consumers go to maintain their own health and well-being.

Maintenance

Maintenance is the most overwhelming area of concern and is simply a non-negotiable part of the new normal, as it relates to flooring, which is the last line of defense in a building. In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, the reality is that we are fighting the existence of a microorganism. While we address the reality of disinfection, the consumer will correlate safe with clean; and, the opposite of clean is dirty. We will also be promoting more robust prevention activities to keep dirt out of buildings, as well as the obvious challenge of cleaning.

Prevention: Entry Systems

Stopping dirt at the door is the most overlooked tool in the battle to keep floors clean. Most dirt is tracked into a facility on the soles of shoes. While buildings can create some dust through the HVAC system and open windows and doors allow airborne contaminants to enter, the soles of customers' shoes are the primary vehicle of concern. Most facilities try to address this with some kind of entry mat, but most fall short of creating the proper barrier to make a real difference.

The simple equation for capturing dirt at the door is the proper abrasive material and the distance necessary to create enough footfalls to remove the dirt. A simple mat is better than nothing, but only helps if the customer stops and actually wipes their feet.

We do not recommend exterior mats unless there is an effective roof or awning to protect the mat. If an exterior mat is exposed to the elements, it will offer very little value. For that reason, we suggest keeping your efforts focused on the interior space.

While every facility will face unique challenges, whether the sand of Arizona or clay of Georgia, our recommendation is 20 feet of a proper entry way matting.

Prevention: Transition Mats

The next level of prevention is to keep dirt from moving around your facility. We recommend transition mats at key areas between different surfaces or access points within your facility. Key areas would be access areas to any traditional hardwood or multipurpose courts surfaces (like Ecore's Bounce 2 product). Mats in these areas not only prevent movement of dirt but also create a safer environment, since clean shoes and court surfaces typically help prevent slips and falls. Other examples of good places for transition mats include the entrances to locker rooms, training-therapy rooms, restrooms and any food service areas. All of these places are scrutinized by members/guests for cleanliness.

Cleaning

We have developed [cleaning guidelines](#) and [related videos](#) that cover all the specific applications within sports, fitness and recreation facilities, based on the unique types of flooring in each area:

- o Composition Rubber
- o Hard Surfaces or Resilient
- o Soft Surfaces: Carpet and Turf

The key concepts of cleaning can be broken down into three areas: chemistry, agitation and extraction. There can be different levels of effort applied across all three to achieve the desired outcome. To achieve social distancing, you may need to re-configure your equipment layout. When you move equipment around, it will reveal uneven wear and soiling in traffic lanes. The act of moving equipment is going to require some aggressive cleaning.

Maintenance (Continued)

Cleaning: Chemistry

Chemistry can be described as a simple detergent that helps loosen the bonds of dirt and contaminants on a surface, or a more aggressive solution that actually breaks down the molecular bonds of residual contaminants. Chemistry also matters when there is a build-up of cleaning solution by-products on a surface as a result of improper cleaning methods. Ecore offers solutions to all these issues. Ecore E-Cleaner is a bio-based product that has the ability to air dry and not leave a residue, while our more aggressive solution is E-Strip. E-Strip's high acetone solution will break down build up from years of neglect for a deep or restorative type process; it even allows you to strip away applied finishes or sealants that may have been previously applied. It is worth noting here that Ecore also offers composition rubber surfaces with a factory applied ECOguard finish, which can also be site applied. These finishes allow for less intensive maintenance but are not recommended in areas with substantial weight drop (in excess of 50 pounds).

Cleaning: Agitation

Agitation is the type and amount of force applied to a surface and the abrasive nature of the tool being used. Think of the difference between a sponge and steel wool. We cover cleaning protocols that allow for the common rotary scrubbing equipment available in most facilities. While cumbersome and not ideal in all cases, these handheld walk-behind or even ride-on tools allow for the different types of agitation appropriate for many hard or rubber surfaces. Our protocols will toggle between brush attachments to more aggressive red and then black pads that are recommended for periodic restorative or even deep cleanings, which may be required after years of neglect.

Ecore also offers some new guidelines related to the emerging use of "pressure washing" in the interior landscape. While this equipment may require a larger initial investment, the ability to manipulate the pressure of the water is proving to be a great alternative to traditional scrubbing

Cleaning: Irrigation/Extraction

Irrigation and extraction add water to achieve a rinsing effect. The result is the removal of the detergent and water that was used to release and hold the dirt and contaminants. Irrigation and extraction also serve as part of the equation for drying time. Extraction is often the most overlooked part of cleaning. It is critical to match more aggressive chemistry, agitation and irrigation with adequate extraction.

Unfortunately, it is common for people to essentially just move the dirt around in the cleaning process. If detergent-based cleaning products are used and not adequately extracted, the surfactants that attract dirt away from the surface are left and continue to attract dirt. This is why carpet seems to get dirty faster after you clean it with a residential steam cleaner; it's not powerful enough to pull everything out of the fiber.

An example of the lowest levels of aggression would be mopping with a dry microfiber mop after applying some simple cleaner to a group fitness floor. Aggression is typically measured by the power of the extraction motor. Ecore recommends investing in a powerful extraction machine, whether incorporated into standard walk behind auto scrubber or more versatile extraction machine, that can be used in conjunction with pressure washing heads or traditional carpet/turf wands.

Disinfection

This activity is clearly getting the most attention. COVID-19 is simply another micro-organism that we are battling in the sports, fitness and recreation space. While staphylococcus has been on our radar for some time, COVID-19 has elevated awareness of pathogens to a new level. It is critical to clarify that clean floors (absence of dirt) are not necessarily disinfected floors (absence of pathogens).

Flooring represents the largest surface in a facility. It also is the most challenging area for cross contamination. We have data from the healthcare industry that shows active COVID-19 micro-organisms were found on the soles of shoes of the majority of frontline caregivers. That means they were picking up the virus on the floor and tracking it around the facility. Ecore offers some guidelines on the process and precautions of disinfecting and some potential delivery mechanisms. With safety in our DNA, we are strongly recommending the use of EPA-approved disinfectants. Ecore has partnered with Rochester Midland Corporation to distribute its Enviro Care Neutral Disinfectant. We know that there are going to be supply challenges, and we want to do our part to make sure our customers have what they need to create safe spaces.

Re-Organization & Re-Design

We have compiled a short list of suggestions, initiatives and products to help create a sense of confidence for the consumer as facilities re-open. As our focus is on the flooring that is essentially the entire facility footprint, we want to acknowledge the new normal may require more square footage per customer. What can we do to maximize existing space to spread people out appropriately? While the use of simple tape or retail stickers is common, they typically do not offer the right coefficient of friction for sports or fitness activities and could, therefore, create a slip/fall hazard. Ecore offers a range of floor graphics that can be as simple as a directional arrow or as complicated as a photographic image. The key is a PUR coating on the surface that minimizes slips and falls.

Ecore is promoting the use of floor decals and graphics to help ensure people maintain the correct social distance. We also want to call attention here to the obvious efforts to separate cardio machines and selectorized strength equipment.

Below are simple initiatives, using our floor graphics, to promote social distancing as well as wayfinding to mitigate congestion. We also offer some direction from the flooring side on how to re-purpose existing space to create more usable square footage, in the short term, without a significant investment.

1.) Social Distancing

Group Fitness: Decals with numbers to properly space people apart. It will also allow people to reserve spots online to prevent overcrowding in general.

Functional Training: Graphics to indicate proper usage and to promote adequate spacing around multi-use pieces.

Courts: Decals as signage to promote limited use of court spaces.

2.) Wayfinding

Tracks: Simple directional arrows to keep everyone moving in the same direction.

Entry Queues: Decals as simple lines to mitigate congestion and potential cross-contamination areas.

Water Stations & Vending Ares: Simple lines and graphics that promote social distances in congested areas.

Free Weight Areas: Graphics promoting the use of hand sanitizer frequently and reminders to wipe down equipment after use.

3.) Re-purposing Space

Racquetball and Squash Courts: These seem to be ideal areas to gain space for group fitness or functional training.

Our caution from a flooring perspective is that hard wood courts of any kind are not appropriate for any weight training. Weights will permanently damage wood floors.

Outdoor Spaces: The use of outdoor spaces during the initial stages of reopening for functional training and/or some group classes is weather/climate dependent.

As we get through the initial challenges of reopening, the next phase will be to reexamine the entire sports and recreation space. Below are some suggestions that should help prioritize future investments from a flooring perspective. The overarching theme here is the cross pollination of health and wellness into sports, fitness and recreation.

Sanitary and Safe Flooring

Heightened expectations will encourage investments in flooring materials that are not hospitable to microorganisms. Like human beings, microorganisms need shelter, warmth and food. Major areas of concern are barefoot and wet areas. Locker rooms, shower areas and therapy/treatment rooms will likely be a major focus. Porosity and open seams

Re-Organization & Re-Design (Continued)

are potential problem areas, as they could harbor pathogens. We anticipate a trend away from soft surfaces in these areas, as well as an increasing use of roll/sheet goods, where the seams can be either heat or chemically welded. Grout also offers some hygiene challenges and would make ceramic and porcelain tile less desirable long-term. We also see the overarching trend of safety influencing more specifications for products that mitigate slips and falls as well as the severity of injuries related to falls.

At Ecore, this is right up our alley! We offer a full range of vinyl and PVC-free rubber that is non-porous and seamless with all the ergonomic, acoustic and safety characteristics that come with patented itsTRU technology. All of these changes driven by COVID-19 will also address some of the long-standing issues related to MRSA.

Multipurpose Flooring

Designing flexibility into the next generation of facilities will be a priority. Traditional sports surfaces tend to be one dimensional. While hardwood courts offer the ideal experience for basketball, they do not effectively support the wide range of other physical activities that are becoming more common.

Synthetic surfaces that meet the desired class of sport court performance, while accommodating point loads and rolling loads, are flexible solutions that can support a wide range of activities. Specifying a multipurpose surface like our Bounce 2 allows for a great basketball experience while also providing the ability to host events with tables and chairs, as well as group fitness classes with kettle bells and bars and dance teams. A multi-purpose surface like this allows for a large commitment of square footage to become an asset instead of a liability because of its flexibility.

Outdoor Spaces

We already have seen a surge in demand for outdoor spaces in the sports and recreation field based on pre-COVID-19 trends. With the simple reality that outdoor spaces are safer and less expensive to operate in the new normal, we see a shift to more flexible indoor/outdoor environments that are convertible, based on climate and season change. We also see a surge in demand for more adult playground settings with equipment focused more on recreation activities than strictly fitness. The general surge in wellness will challenge facilities to supply outdoor gathering spaces that provide a flexible and natural social setting.

Conclusion

For existing sports, fitness and recreation spaces, the post-COVID standards for hygiene, cleanliness and sanitation will be different than pre-COVID practices. In this document, we presented a prescription to keep sports, fitness and recreation facilities' most widely used equipment, the flooring, healthy and safe for people to use. We've also taken the time to anticipate the near future, in which our pre-conceived notions of space and use will be challenged. Ecore hopes this information will enable to realize your facility's potential while also providing benefits to your members, customers and guests.