

**PLEASE WIPE
YOUR FEET**

Engaging The Enemy – Dirt

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You probably walk across one every day. Most people do as the final stage in their commute to work. Depending on weather conditions, you've probably seen people stand and wipe as well as scrape their feet on an entrance mat at the front or rear entry doors. The construction of the mat almost encourages it, if not demands it. Great quality mats are like that. They get the job done because they are like the proverbial sentinel forever alert outside the building encouraging clean shoes, and guarding the inside from dirt, dust, grime, mud, water, and all other things that push up indoor floor maintenance costs.

Writing in an article in Shopping Center World, author, Paul Clark says "up to 24 pounds of dirt can be tracked in by just 1,000 people coming through an entrance over a 20-day work period" Mat manufacturers such as Kleen-Tex say that it can cost up to \$600 to remove one pound of dirt from a building. Other sources such as American Institute of Architects say that dusting, vacuuming, mopping, waxing, and stripping floors to eliminate grit, dust, and dirt from floors can range from 30 percent to 50 percent of total cleaning budget. Dust Control Association cites a general rule in building maintenance industry, i.e. for every dollar spent keeping dirt outside, owners and managers will save \$10 in cleaning costs. This is important when you consider that

entry of dirt, grime, dust and grit into buildings means erosion of floor polish or premature fading of expensive carpets. A 3M study reveals that when 1,500 individuals walk through the entrance of a building with no front entrance mat, up to 42 percent of the floor finish can be damaged or removed within the first six feet of the inside entrance. The cost of cleaning is mostly in labor. On the other hand, the mat occupies a small area, yet collects all that grime and dirt, and is much less costly to clean and maintain. Seems like a "no-brainer." While a mat program should be the main line of defense, other things can be done to minimize entry of dirt and grim into buildings and associated costs.

Conduct an Exterior Survey

To prevent dirt and pollutants from entering buildings, experts agree that an exterior analysis is needed first. The exterior environment of each building will vary, but in order to ensure the maximum protection of tenants and building interior, a good understanding of exterior conditions, sources of pollutants, and situations that cause pollutions is needed.

At a minimum, this can be accomplished by conducting an exterior survey and recording findings. Examine weather conditions, roads, walkways, trees and shrubbery, and surfaces that may be inadequately drained. In addition, look at sources of pollution and damage that might result from pigeons, birds, fountains, decorative ponds, and trash. Use your finding

as input into a master strategy to keep the enemy dirt out of your building.

Have a Good Defensive System

As people begin to approach buildings, a first line of defense (before the entrance mat) is the textured stone or brick walkway where excess dirt starts to be scraped off shoes. Many buildings have these and this is preferable to smooth surfaces. It is advisable to keep this area well cleaned of debris, dirt, and dust that can accumulate and end up on the mat or in the building. This can be accomplished by sweeping and by using a water hose.

The main shield of defense is the front entrance mat. Expert opinion says that the ideal mat system should have a 15' outside mat, and a 10' "inside the door" mat. The first mat scrapes off the heavy dirt, mud, and moisture; the second mat captures remaining soils and dries shoes. Ideally, a person should be able to take four steps on each mat to ensure maximum capture of dirt and dust on shoes. If there is a vestibule between the main entry door and the interior, a smaller mat is necessary. It is estimated that a good entrance mat system captures up to 90% of all tracked in dirt. This means a 15' entrance mat should be capable of trapping 30% of the incoming soil within the first three feet, and 90% within 15 feet. This type of heavy duty cleaning means that front entrance mats need to be frequently cleaned. In addition, the floor area just inside the building is more likely to be soiled than other areas and needs to be especially targeted for frequent cleaning.

Main Line of Defense

What is it about well-constructed entrance mats that make them such work

horses? To describe entrance mats in a visually simple way is to say they have two parts. The upper part takes all the walking on and wiping and scraping. The lower part of the mat is a storage area for dirt and water that comes off shoes. An analogy of an effective mat is like the commercial for trapping roaches – "roaches go in but they doesn't come out." One of the keys is the a beveled "water dam" safety feature on the mat. This prevents water and dirt from seeping out and either being carried into a building or becoming a "slip and fall" hazard. If the mat does not have this dam like feature, water and dirt will escape reducing the effectiveness and purpose of the mat. Another problem with seepage is that the water can cause damage to floors and can ruin expensive finish on floors inside the building. Mats may also have cleats on the bottom that provides better traction, prevents mat movement, and enables moisture contained in the mat to dry more easily so the mat doesn't lose its effectiveness.

Entrance Mat

What is the difference between a well-constructed mat and one that is of poor quality? Mats constructed only of ribbed or square patterned face yarn will not hold up under foot pressure, and this causes more water and dirt to reattach to shoes and to be tracked into buildings. Look for a permanent rubber membrane that will support the face yarn throughout the mat's productive life. High performance mats have a permanent rubber reinforcing membrane that will permanently support the textile face, increasing product unity and extending useful product life. Next time you step on an entrance mat, think of it as your building's primary defensive in helping keep your building cleaner, safer, dust free, and less expensive to maintain.