Polypropylene Carpets, Why Can They Be So Hard To Clean?

Is Polypropylene carpet (polyprop) any different from other carpets? Yes it is! Here are some characteristics that make it different.

**Solution-Dyed:** Polypropylene is non-absorbent and is dyed in the manufacturing process. The colours are permanent.

**Stain Resistant:** The non-absorbent nature of Polypropylene carpet makes it almost impossible to stain. It is resistant to most alkalis and acids so you can go after spots with your most aggressive cleaners including oxidisers. Having said that some organic solvents such as citrus solve adversely affect it.

**Poor Resilience:** Polypropylene fibres are considered very strong and very abrasion resistant. However, they have some resiliency problems and tend to mat and crush in high-traffic areas. No matter how good you are at cleaning carpet, crushing or matting is not restorable. Your customer needs to be made aware of that.

**Oil Accumulator:** Polypropylene is oliophilic. That means that it has a strong natural affinity for oils. It attracts oily soils. Oily soils and spills can be difficult to remove and when left for an extended time may cause discolouration.

This presents the following cleaning challenge:

When a water-based cleaning solution is applied to a wool or nylon carpet, some of the solution is absorbed into fibres, while the rest flows toward the backing due to pressure and gravitational forces. However, Polypropylene does not absorb the solution and therefore allows more of your cleaning solution to flow into the backing. Any soiled solution in a Polypropylene carpet, which is not recovered by the cleaning system, will then work its way back to the surface to evaporate. As a result, water-soluble surfactants, detergents or additives as well as residual soils will be carried to the surface as well. This can cause a variety of streaking, yellowing and browning effects, and recurring spots. More commonly referred to as wickback.

Your steps to Polypropylene cleaning success:

**Step 1 – Remove Dry Soils**

First, vacuum, vacuum, vacuum! Remove as much insoluble soil as possible before applying your cleaning solution. Most soil (79 percent) is insoluble, meaning it will not return to a liquid state with water or dry solvents. Studies have shown this type of soil is best removed by dry vacuuming.

**Step 2 – Suspend Soils and Oils**

Using a prespray that is specially formulated to clean Polypropylene will help your end result considerably. Polybreak is a special blend of solvents and emulsifiers designed to lift oily soils from Polypropylene without causing resoiling.

**Step 3 – Remove Soils and Neutralise**

Once the soil has been suspended it must be physically removed. The use of an acid or conditioning rinse is effective in removing suspended soils whilst leaving the carpet in a neutral or slightly acidic condition. Acid rinsing will help prevent the browning or wickback that is commonly associated with Polypropylene carpets. It also prepares the carpet for the application of a protector.
When extracting control the amount of moisture you apply. Reduce your water pressure to between 100 and 150psi. Use the three-stroke wand method. Stroke one – forward, to remove as much of the prespray and suspended soils as possible before applying more moisture. Stroke 2 – back, to rinse and extract suspended soils from fibres. Stroke 3 – forward, as an additional drying stroke. Let off the trigger at the beginning and end of your cleaning stroke. Make sure that for each wet stroke of the wand you follow it with a dry pass.

**Step 4 – Drying**

Dry the carpet as quickly as possible. Where there has been a history of browning or wickback a dry pass over the cleaned area with a cotton bonnet is advisable. Use your grandi-groom to set the nap of the carpet. This will help considerably to speed drying times. Ventilate the room as best as possible by opening the windows and turning fans and HVAC systems on. Use air movers if possible.

**Step 5 – Protect**

It is a widely held belief that due to the stain resistant properties of Polypropylene carpet there is no need to apply a carpet protector. Carpet protectors keep those oily soils on the surface where they belong. Future cleaning will be much easier and more effective.

**Spot Cleaning Tip**

When asked to remove an oil-based stain, try not to use your spotting machine. Simply blot the stain with a white towel dipped in Acetone. (Polypropylene will stand up to substantial abrasion compared with wool or nylon). If there is a potential for wicking, pack the stain in a poultice of Chemspec Absorb-A-Stain.