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## Maintenance Recommendations for Ceramic Tiles, Porcelain, Grout and Natural Stone Flooring

Tile and stone are a popular choice for flooring as they provide a practical and aesthetically pleasing surface that is easy to care for and long-lasting. By following the basic principles described below, you will maintain your floor in good condition, with many years of trouble-free service.

### Eliminate grit

Sand or grit, tracked onto the floor by footwear, can cause premature wearing of hard-surface flooring and damage floors by abrading and scratching the surface. These easy-to-follow steps will help keep your floor in good condition:

1. Place dust mats by the door, ideally one inside and outside.
2. Clean the mats regularly, as they will eventually get full of grit.
3. Sweep, vacuum or dust mop the floor regularly to keep grit down to a minimum. Take care not to trap grit under metal parts of the vacuum cleaner. A soft brush or broom is preferred.

### Attend to spills as they occur

Even though your floor may be protected by a glaze, or a seal of some kind, liquid contaminant spills should be removed as soon as possible after they occur. The longer spills are left to dwell on grout or unglazed materials, the more likely they are to create a stain. Also, some liquids may be acidic, such as red wine, fruit juices, coffee and soft drinks, and can etch the surface of acid-sensitive surfaces, in addition to potentially causing a stain, so speed is of the essence. Use absorbent paper towels or similar items to absorb as much of the spillage as possible. Let any remaining stain dry and then wash lightly with a neutral detergent (see “Routine Maintenance” below). Never apply a cleaning solution directly onto a spill before wiping off the excess first, as this may drive the contaminant deeper into the surface.

### Routine maintenance

For routine cleaning, use a mild, neutral detergent, such as MAPEI’s UltraCare™ Concentrated Tile & Grout Cleaner. The use of “off-the-shelf” high-alkaline cleaners should be kept to a minimum, and avoid using bleach. Follow the label instructions for proper dilution and use. How often you will need to do this will depend on the type and frequency of the foot traffic. Some floors will require washing more frequently while others less so, but for a guide, once per week should be sufficient. Some high-polished surfaces may require buffing with a dry towel immediately after rinsing to avoid streaking. Using a microfiber mop may also be more convenient.

### Periodic deep cleaning

From time to time, it may be necessary to give the floor and grout joints an intensive “deep cleaning”. This may be only once per year, again depending on exposure to dirt and maintenance practices. Tiles with a heavily textured surface will require more frequent deep cleanings than smooth-surfaced floors. Rough-textured surfaces will also benefit from the use of a deck or scrubbing brush, rather than a regular mop. To effectively remove built-up grease and grime, use an alkaline cleaner, such as UltraCare Heavy-Duty Stone, Tile & Grout Cleaner. Follow all label instructions. For heavily soiled or neglected areas, use UltraCare Abrasive Surface Cleaner in conjunction with the Heavy-Duty Stone, Tile & Grout Cleaner for best results.

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## Problematic deep stains

Occasionally, even with deep cleaning, some spot stains can occur. Often, these can be removed with the use of a poultice like UltraCare Deep Stain Remover for Stone.

## Periodic resealing

If your floor or grout was sealed, it may require a periodic re-application of sealer to ensure the appropriate level of protection is maintained. You can test the integrity of your sealer by occasionally conducting a water test. Simply drop some clean water onto the tiles or grout and let it sit for a few moments. If the water penetrates into the surface and leaves a significant dark patch that takes a while to dry out, then it may be time to reseal. If the water leaves no visible change, or just a faint shadow which dries to leave no mark (this is called “surface wetting” and is normal for most impregnating sealers), then it is fine. If resealing is necessary, make sure the surface is clean and dry before applying sealer. It is also recommended to use the same sealer, if possible.

## About cleaners

Soaps and detergents are used for cleaning because pure water alone can't remove oily, organic soiling. Also, straight tap water may be hard and can leave hard-water stains or mineral deposits. Soaps clean by allowing oily contaminants and water to mix so that they can be removed during rinsing. Detergents are similar to soap, but they are less likely to form films (soap scum). Both require some form of mechanical action, such as scrubbing, to be effective.

## Stains vs. etching

A stain is the permanent or semi-permanent mark which is left behind in a stone or other porous surface when a contaminant penetrates into the surface and dries. Stains can often be removed, but not always. An etch mark is actual physical damage to the surface. Etching is most commonly noticed when an acid-based material comes in contact with an acid-sensitive surface. Surfaces that are acid-sensitive include marble, travertine, limestone, cement-based grout, cement-based terrazzo, concrete, some slates and granites, and calcium-based products. An etched stone surface will appear as a dull, rough area of the surface, particularly on polished marble. To correct a surface that has been etched, regrinding and polishing of the surface may be required.

*Note: These recommendations are intended as general guidelines for the proper care and maintenance of ceramic tile, stone and grout. Actual dilution rates and maintenance requirements may vary depending upon the use, foot traffic, frequency and contaminants common to the area. ALWAYS READ PRODUCT DIRECTIONS THOROUGHLY PRIOR TO USE. ALWAYS TEST FIRST TO CONFIRM DESIRED RESULTS.*

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Why use a sealer?** Stone, grout and masonry materials are porous and, if not properly sealed, can easily stain. Sealers protect the surface from damage caused by exposure to chemicals, foot traffic, food, beverages, cooking oils and a variety of other contaminants. Sealers can also greatly reduce maintenance by allowing easy cleanup of spills and dirt. Some sealers can enhance the natural colors and veining in stone, some keep the surface looking natural and others produce a gloss.

**How often do I need to apply a sealer?** This depends on the type and quality of sealer used, the type of tile or stone, where the tile is located (interior/exterior, kitchen or bath), the type and frequency of foot traffic, and cleaning and maintenance routines. UltraCare sealers have a standard expected protection for up to five years and maximum protection of up to 15 years.

**How do I know if the sealer is working?** A simple, effective way to test the sealer is to drip water onto the treated surface and allow it to stand for several minutes. If the water leaves no mark when wiped off, then the sealer is working. If the water penetrates and leaves a dark spot, it's probably time to reseal.

**What's the difference between a penetrating/impregnating sealer and a topical sealer?** Penetrating sealers, often called impregnators, penetrate into the surface, leaving the surface unchanged in appearance. Topical sealers form a film and sit on top of the surface, giving the surface a sheen.

**What is the best way to apply a sealer?** Sealers can be applied using a paint pad, sponge or roller. Spraying is generally not recommended, but can be effective in some applications.

**What is the best cleaner for tile and stone?** Always use a neutral-pH cleaner for routine and daily maintenance. Acidic cleaners should only be used on acid-resistant surfaces and strong alkaline cleaners should only be used in heavily soiled or neglected areas, for periodic cleaning. Neither acid nor alkaline cleaners should be used for regular maintenance.

**How often should I clean my tile?** This will depend on what type of stone or tile is used, where the tile is located, how much foot traffic, etc. Rough-textured stone or tile will require a more frequent and intensive cleaning than a smooth or polished tile. Kitchen floors will need to be cleaned more frequently than bedroom floors. Generally, cleaning once per week is sufficient.

**I have a stain on my polished marble floor that won't come out. Is there anything that will help?** Yes. UltraCare Deep Stain Remover for Stone is designed to help absorb food, grease and oil stains from natural stone. This product is non-toxic, nonflammable, and is safe and easy to use.

**My contractor used epoxy grout on my tile and now there is a residue on the surface that won't come off. Is there a cleaner that will take off the haze?** Yes. UltraCare Epoxy Grout Haze Remover is designed specifically to remove dried epoxy residue from the surface of ceramic tile, porcelain tile and stone surfaces. This professional-strength, water-based formula is easy to use, low-odor and non-flammable.

**After my tile was installed, a cement-like haze has been seen on the tiles. What is it and can it be removed?** Yes, it can be removed. It is known as "grout haze" and is caused by leftover cement from the grouting process that wasn't properly removed during the cleaning stage. This haze can easily be removed from the tile surface by using UltraCare Cement Grout Haze Remover. This proprietary, acid-based cleaner will easily remove cement grout haze from the surface of acid-resistant tiles. Never use acid-based cleaners on marble surfaces, as they can cause damage to these surfaces.

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