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CARPET AND ITS POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE TOTAL INDOOR ENVIRONMENT

A lot is being said and written these days about indoor air pollution and the "health" of the indoor environment. Of further interest to us is the role of carpet in all of this. As we are swamped with information from experts around the world about carpet and its role in the indoor environment, perhaps it would be appropriate to remind ourselves, and most importantly the carpet consumer, about the important positive contributions that carpet makes to the total indoor environment. The author comes at this subject from a very distinct point of view - as a member of the professional carpet cleaning industry. It is this experience, both as a cleaner and as a teacher of cleaners, that provides a "real world out-of-the-showroom" perspective about both the performance of carpet and its overall contributions to the indoor environment.

As an outside observer, but in many ways an inside participant to the retail carpet market, it surprises me how very little some retail salespeople understand and know these features of wall-to-wall carpet. So, if you're not at all concerned about indoor air quality, just consider this a review course of the features and benefits of carpeting.

1. **Appearance** - Carpet makes a room look better and it adds to the decor. By using color, patterns, and pile heights, an instant presentation of an image is presented. This wide array of color, patterns, and pile heights allows a carpet to fit into an indoor environment without having to dominate it.
2. **Style** - Color and appearance are part of how a decor is "fulfilled", but carpet also can make a statement more deep than appearance. It can match a style. Through different fibers, different denier, different face weights, different pile heights, carpet truly can make a statement about a home or business. It allows individual or corporate expression.
3. **Insulation** - Carpet can help save energy. It is an important contributor to the insulation of the indoor environment. Ever gotten up in the morning and had to walk with your bare feet on a cold, hard floor? See, I've made my point. Carpet really does help keep warm in, but just as importantly creates a psychological impression that the room is warm. This may very well be carpets most overlooked but important contribution.
4. **"Feel"** - Every time I walk through United Airlines new billion dollar terminal in Chicago, I cringe. How could such a beautiful structure still leave such a cold impression? It's simple: there is no carpeting. Have you ever tried to "curl up" in front of the fireplace on a hard surface floor? Carpet feels good. It's soft, it's easier on the feet, and it provides a "softer feel" to the whole indoor environment.
5. **Acoustics** - Carpet eliminates the echo chamber effect. It collects and dampens noise. In today's hustle and bustle, hither go yonder world, this may be carpets most important contribution. It absorbs sound and creates a quiet, more controlled, peaceful atmosphere.

6. Safety - Everyone reading this article has at one time or another slipped on a hard surface floor. Try to slip on a carpet. It's hard to do. Carpet provides a safety barrier that just can't be ignored, especially in a commercial environment. Besides, if someone does trip and fall, a carpet is a lot softer place to land than a hard floor.
7. Professional Image - Carpet makes a statement about a company's image. Picture the company president's office without carpet. Picture going into a high ranking legal firm without carpet in their office. All of its other features make it a necessary part of presenting the right image about a company.
8. "Concealability" - All one has to do is a little research about the development of nylon carpet fiber to understand that carpet is made to hide and conceal dirt, soil, and other materials which inevitably end up on it and in it. A carpet can hold and hide (in fact, it's made to) a great deal of soiling and still look good, especially compared to other floor covering alternatives. In a residential home, a linoleum floor has to be swept daily and mopped at least weekly for it to look good. A residential carpet can go as long as eighteen months before it requires professional cleaning. Carpet was designed to conceal soiling, and it does it better than any other floor covering.
9. Ease of Maintenance - One of the most frustrating things as a carpet cleaner is hearing from people who think carpet is more expensive to maintain than hard surface floors. Anyone who has ever been responsible for the professional upkeep of a linoleum or hard wood floor knows that is not the case. Equipment, chemicals, and training are available that make a carpet easy to maintain. Admittedly, the person who maintains that carpet must be trained in how to use that equipment and chemical, but then so must a hard surface floor maintenance person. Add to that the fact that carpet cleaning can be both by interim maintenance "appearance" methods for the short run (such as bonnet, dry foam, and dry powder) as well as restorative appearance, wearability, and health, in the longer run (hot water extraction). Carpet can be maintained at an excellent appearance and health level.
10. Collection and Filtration Center - If all carpet is being accused of contributing to indoor air pollution, then it is being blamed unfairly. Only improperly cleaned and maintained carpet can do that. When carpet acts as a sink that everything collects in, it filters airborne soiling and pollutants from the airspace. That is a major advantage of carpeting. No other home or business furnishing does a better job of collecting and filtering soil and pollutants whereby they can be properly and completely removed and taken away by periodic professional hot water extraction cleaning. Carpet prevents the migration of pollutants and bio-contaminants throughout the indoor environment. Carpet is a positive indoor filter and collection center. When properly maintained by professional hot water extraction cleaning, it contributes to a healthier indoor environment.

I know that I am beginning to sound like Mr. Rogers of Public Television fame when I say that "Carpeting is your friend", but those of us involved in the cleaning and maintenance of carpeting truly believe it is the ideal floor covering for almost all circumstances. If problems exist with carpet, it is not when they are new, it's because the carpet is not being properly maintained.

Now, more than ever, it is essential that the entire carpet industry, (from the fiber producer, to the carpet mill, to the distributor, to the retailer, to the installer, and to the cleaner), work together to "sell" the benefits of carpeting and to emphasize the positive contributions it makes to the indoor environment. All of our livelihoods may well depend on it.

About the Author:

R. Doyle Bloss is the Chief Executive Officer for Steam Way International, Inc. in Denver, Colorado. Steam Way is a leading manufacturer of carpet care equipment and cleaning solutions and is involved in the study and education of carpet maintenance subjects throughout the carpet industry.