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## Safety Bulletin: Safe Floor Refinishing



Waxed floor refinishing in schools occurs every summer and has its own special set of injury-causing hazards. Your awareness and adherence to best practices and procedures is key to avoiding potentially serious injury. The following precautions will help you complete the tasks safely:

### Concern #1: **Burns**



### Practice these **Precautions**

Floor stripper products and solutions can *burn eyes and skin* upon contact.

Review SDS and label for burn hazards, safeguards and proper Personal Protective Equipment use to protect eyes, hands, knees, feet and any exposed skin. Use the recommended PPE, and be prepared to quickly wash off stripper solutions if contacted. Do not kneel into stripper solution – it will burn you!

### Concern #2: **Slips, Trips and Falls**



### Practice these **Precautions**

Wet stripper/wax slurries on floors create *slip hazards*. Electrical cords are potential *trip hazards*. Falls to hard floor

surfaces can result in very serious (head) injuries and burns caused by direct contact with the caustic stripper.

Apply and remove stripper in small areas to avoid the need to walk through large, slippery areas. Likewise, plan your work to avoid walking in stripper/wax slurries. Wear slip-resistant over-boots (such as CrewGuards®). Manage power cords and be aware of their locations.

### Concern #3: **Electricity**

### Practice these **Precautions**

*Electric shocks* from 120-volt AC equipment used in floor finishing can kill if you contact faulty equipment and an electrical ground (floor, metal appliances and any electricity-conducting surfaces). Liquids on the floor increase the chance of receiving a fatal shock if the equipment has an electrical short to ground.

In wet operations like floor stripping and refinishing, orbital buffers, fans or other electric equipment must be protected by Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs); a portable GFCI may be required to avoid potential electrocutions. Also, pre-inspect all electrical cords and plugs for damage – ensure grounding plugs (three-pronged plugs) are always in place. Discard or make necessary repairs by a qualified electrician before using.

### Concern #4: **Lifting**

### Practice these **Precautions**

Usually the floor refinishing process begins by moving a lot of furniture. *Improper lifting techniques* can result in back, shoulder, arm, neck and knee injuries. Back injuries can be disabling.

Review safe lifting practices before starting. Work in teams to move heavier, bulkier items, such as desks and furnishings. Use lifting aides such as dollies and two-wheeled handcarts. Never lift more than you can safely handle. Note: 35 lbs. *might* be a reasonable individual lifting limit, but it may still be too much for some – ask for help to protect your back.

### Concern #5: **Heat**

### Practice these **Precautions**

In many instances, thermostats might be set to “off” or at higher settings to conserve utility costs during summer months. Hot work environments can result in *dehydration*, which clouds judgment, reduces muscle function and increases the likelihood of injury. Heat stroke is a life-threatening condition.

Coordinate with your maintenance department or your energy manager to keep air-conditioning units operating at comfortable ranges for a safe working environment until you’ve finished the project. Drink plenty of cool water or a diluted sports drink solution during the day. Supervisors may need to provide cool drinking water. Take regular breaks to rest and rehydrate.

### Concern #6: **Time**

### Practice these **Precautions**

Turnaround time for floor refinishing may be tight. *Rushing* through floor stripping/refinishing projects creates unnecessary hazards.

Plan ahead. Train new employees on hazards and procedures. Staff for success. Avoid rushing – that’s when injuries become more likely.

### **Resources//**

*Product manufacturers and custodial service companies can provide additional guidance on proper techniques, procedures and precautions to help you have a safe, injury-free floor refinishing experience. Check with your suppliers for additional resources. Ask if they provide training to support your needs for a safe floor refinishing project. Several YouTube™ videos posted by floor service companies may also be useful resources.*

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