

# A WISE FACILITY OWNER IS A "FLOOR CONSCIOUS" OWNER

BY STEVEN METZGER, METZGER/McGUIRE CO.



*Many facilities begin operation with a serviceable and productive floor, but its ongoing maintenance and care are often overlooked.*

Several years ago we performed a survey of the industrial floors in four distribution centers for one of our major corporate clients. We were scheduled to meet with the VP of Distribution, VP of Corporate Engineering and the VP of Finance. The purpose of the meeting was to justify the repair costs we had estimated for each of the facilities, and to explain why there was such a spread between the costs.

In advance of the meeting I had asked the VP of Distribution if he could do some research and compile a facility-by-facility comparison of man-hour productivity, material handling vehicle maintenance costs, worker's compensation claims and absenteeism rates. He agreed to compile the information for our meeting.

Our repair estimates ranged from a low of \$17,000 for Facility "A" to a high of \$103,000 for Facility "D," even though they were roughly the same age, size and design, and were built by the same contractor. The first question asked was whether I felt the general contractor had been deficient on the facility with the \$103,000 price tag. I said no, that the construction quality on all the floors was comparable. I indicated that the only major difference between the DC's was in their operational management. The DC with the \$17,000 estimate had been "floor conscious" from the beginning. The DC with the highest repair costs had apparently given little, if any, thought to the floor.

Whenever I conduct floor surveys I look for certain telltale signs that tell me how the facility management views the importance of their floor. For example;

## **1. Is the floor clean?**

*Debris left on the floor (such as nails, bolts, pebbles, etc.) can be ground into the floor surface and leave gouges that can result in ongoing deterioration.*

## **2. Is there any sign of joint maintenance?**

*Joints are the most vulnerable part of any floor, and joint deterioration usually starts in the first year of operations. If joints start to deteriorate and nobody notices (or nobody cares), the deterioration will simply continue to grow until it becomes a major and expensive problem.*

## **3. Are there signs of pallet or fork dragging?**

*Concrete is not the indestructible substance some people assume. Pallets may have projecting nails which can easily gouge the floor when pushed. Forklift forks can hit high points of the floor and cause damage.*

## **4. Are vehicle wheels badly deteriorated?**

*An early and obvious sign of deteriorating floors is deteriorated wheels. Floor gouges, ragged cracks and damaged joints all cause wheels to deteriorate. Vehicle wheels operating on a good floor last 2-3 times longer than wheels running across a bad floor.*

## **5. Are floors addressed in the facility maintenance manual?**

*The floor is the "work surface" of every operation. A good floor allows for optimum productivity while keeping operating costs down. A deteriorated floor adversely affects productivity and raises operational costs. If a maintenance manual does not address the floor and its maintenance, it is dangerously incomplete.*



*Deteriorated wheels, excessive surface wear and spalled joints are telltale signs of an owner who is not "floor conscious."*



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When I inspected Facility "A" I immediately noticed that the floor was clean and free of debris. I was barely 100 feet into my inspection before I found a joint that had been repaired. I found many more repairs as my inspection progressed. As vehicles went by I noted that they kept their forks and pallets at least 6" off the ground. When I looked at the parked vehicles, I found the wheels were all in good shape. And when I asked the head maintenance man about his repair procedures, he opened his maintenance manual and showed me his "preventative floor maintenance" section, along with articles and product data he had compiled over the years. I shared this information with the three VP's. I then asked the VP of Distribution if he'd had any luck finding the information I'd requested. He had, and it was informative, especially when comparing Facility "A" (\$17,000 repairs) to Facility "D" (\$103,000 repairs);

## Facility "A" had a:

- 7% higher productivity rate
- 21% lower vehicle maintenance costs
- 8% lower workers compensation claims rate
- 13% lower absenteeism rate

He also mentioned that Facility "D" had recently reported two employee injuries when a vehicle hit a badly damaged joint and the load tipped on top of them.

Reviews of the figures from facilities "B" and "C" also revealed predictable patterns of lost productivity and higher costs based upon the degree of floor deterioration noted during my inspections. Since all of these facilities began operation on essentially a level playing field, the VP's conceded that the differences in operation of each facility likely contributed to their current condition. In fact, the variations in productivity and operational costs among these facilities had been a concern for some time and the firm had been working to identify the source of this problem. The condition of the floor in each facility had been identified as one source of difference, but the cause of the problems and their progression had not been considered or analyzed until now.

One month after my meeting I received a phone call from the VP of Distribution. A budget allocation had been made to repair all four facilities. He went on to thank me for my help in identifying the importance of their floors and to tell me that his company was now making a "preventative floor maintenance" section mandatory for all their facilities, and the maintenance manager from "A" would write it with my help.

In today's rapid-paced, high-tech world it's easy to overlook the basics in any business. When it comes to industrial operations, the basics consist of moving product from *Point A* to *Point B* with maximum productivity and minimum cost, and that movement takes place on your concrete floor. The wise and profitable corporation knows this, and always remains "floor conscious."



The differences in floor cleaning and maintenance procedures at facilities "A" and "D" and the resulting floor condition is easily identifiable in these photos.

Unfortunately many facility owners have a harder time identifying how much more costly Facility "D" is to operate as a result of the poor condition of its floor.

