

Two basic types of Sealers

Sealers are of two basic types:

Penetrating sealers – sealers that penetrate into the pores of the hard surface material and repel water (and in case oil) borne stains. Penetrating sealer do not alter the appearance of the surface and do not leave a glossy film.

Topical sealers – sealers that provide a glossy appearance to the surface of the material.

The choice of which type of sealer to use depends upon factors such as:

- Desired appearance – if a high gloss appearance is desired, apply a topical sealer rather than a penetrating sealer that will not increase gloss.
- Type of surface – sealers unless recommended by the tile manufacturer are generally not used on non-absorptive surfaces such as porcelain tile or glazed tile but may be used to protect the grout joints from staining. (Note: 100% solid epoxy grouts, which are non-absorptive, do not benefit from application of sealers.) Penetrating sealers are commonly used on natural stone surfaces and particularly on low gloss surfaces such as honed marble, limestone or sandstone where one wishes to preserve the natural appearance of the stone.
- Area of application – conventional sealers are generally not used on exterior surfaces, or on honed, sandblasted or flamed surfaces. In areas subjected to high traffic and tracking of grit and moisture, conventional sealers may require frequent routine maintenance to maintain appearance.

Application of sealers

Sealers should only be applied on clean, dry surfaces. Failure to properly clean a floor before application of sealers may aggravate maintenance problems by sealing in dirt or stains.

For the types of sealers, please consult the joined table.

Initial clean-up and protection – New floors

This work is normally performed by the tradesmen installing the floor. It is important that floors be thoroughly cleaned after they are installed and grouted. Failure to perform a proper clean-up at this stage may result in a grout residue being left on the surface that may be very difficult or impossible to remove later. Usually glazed ceramic tile or tile with a high gloss surface is easier to clean. Tile that has an absorptive surface, slip resistant tile with abrasive aggregate in the surface or tile that has an embossed or textured surface may be difficult to clean properly. In some cases it may be necessary to seal tile or apply grout releases prior to grouting to prevent pigment staining.

In some case the floor installer will apply the initial application of sealer to the new floor. In other cases, this work will be performed by the owner's personnel or by outside maintenance professionals. Regardless of who performs the work, it is essential that the floor be clean and free of grout residue, dirt or other contaminants before sealers are applied. Newly installed floors should be protected with kraft paper, drop sheets or by other suitable means to prevent damage or soiling by other trades until completed work is handed over to the owner.

Routine maintenance to remove surface soil

- This usually involves cleaning by vacuuming or sweeping with a push broom to remove dust and grit. This is normally done on a daily basis but the frequency of this procedure and other routine maintenance should be tailored to the requirements.
- Periodic washing. Always wash hard floor surfaces using clean water and a pH neutral (non-ionic) detergent used at the recommended dilution, use the px-300 or the 9006. Apply the cleaning solution evenly on the surface using a mop or spray application. Within five minutes, agitate the solution on the floor to free any attached soil using a 175 rpm rotary scrubber fitted with a fibre scrubbing brush or a nylon scrubbing pad. (Note: A fibre scrubbing brush will clean grout or textured surfaces better.) Pick up liquids from the scrubbed area using a wet vacuum. Rinse with clean water using the floor scrubber to agitate the rinse followed by wet vacuum. Repeat this procedure and then let air dry.

Reference : Terrazzo, Tile and Marble Association of Canada, *2000 Maintenance guide, Terrazzo, Tile and Stone - For a Lifetime of Beauty*, Ontario, 18 pages.