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Taking the Right Steps to Purchase and Maintain Floors

As multifamily housing property owners and managers are well aware, flooring is among the largest operating expenses other than payroll and debt service. It is crucial to be an informed consumer when making decisions about the type of flooring most suitable for a community.

Following are tips that can assist in the decision-making process for carpet and flooring.

Regional vs. National. Select a product that is compatible with the region of the country where the community is located. Some national property management firms or owners might think that purchasing a single flooring product for use across the country might save money, but it instead could prove costly in the long run.

It is possible to maintain a consistent look for multiple locations without using the exact same flooring product nationwide. It is crucial to consider external factors such as sun, heat, humidity or cold when making a purchasing decision. All flooring products are not made equal and react differently to various temperatures, potentially reducing the lifespan of the product and therefore negatively affecting a budget.

In the Sunbelt for example, certain types of flooring are more susceptible to discoloration caused by prolonged exposure to the sun. In addition, flooring products can actually be damaged during delivery or in onsite storage units that are not protected from extreme heat. Another example is the use of continuous filament carpets in southern states because of their tendency to perform better in areas with high levels of humidity.

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Vinyls and Fibers. When choosing vinyl, for example, it is best to select an upgraded vinyl product that features a urethane or aluminum oxide finish. Although these products are more expensive on the front end, they can provide long-term value. Upgraded vinyl flooring offers more protection against discoloration, tearing, mildew, asphalt stain, scuff, curling or other damage that can shorten the replacement cycle.

Advancements are being made in nylon fibers, and top manufacturers are producing polymers that aggressively promote stain control and offer additional durability and wearability today.

New fibers, such as PTT and polyester, can promote higher levels of cleanability and color fastness. Carpets treated with premium stain release and soil protection agents will stand up better to everyday wear and tear as well as protect against harsher damage.

Textured carpets have a tendency to outperform Saxony carpets and provide a

longer life, especially in high-traffic areas.

Color. Although light colors may enhance a room's dimensions, neutrals or earth tones are more practical from a soiling and staining standpoint. Asphalt sealants and other paving products may contribute to yellowing in vinyl and can cause severe damage to carpets.

Maintenance. It is imperative that a routine maintenance schedule be put in place and strictly followed. Some industry surveys indicate that a large percent of apartment residents do not own a vacuum cleaner and those who do are sometimes less than enthusiastic about following good cleaning practices.

Sound, long-term maintenance processes and procedures, such as regular cleaning by knowledgeable professionals using the most suitable cleaning products for particular flooring, can lengthen the replacement cycle.

The use of improper or inappropriate cleaning products or equipment can cause more damage than good and cost more in the long run.

Industry trends are moving toward the use of technology to promote more effective cleaning. Top manufacturers are working to develop cleaning equipment that can analyze and recommend the most appropriate method of cleaning for a particular type of flooring. ■

This article was written by members of the American Flooring Alliance (AFA). To learn more about the AFA or its members, visit the AFA Web site at www.americanflooringalliance.com or call 215/564-3484. The AFA is a national network of full-service flooring installation specialists in the multifamily housing community.