

## Club Flooring Special Feature: Getting Under Foot

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When it comes to construction, flooring is one of the most important aspects of a fitness facility. Whether you are replacing a worn out floor in an existing club or trying to decide what to install in a brand new location, it's important to become familiar with what is available.

Choosing a good floor is literally - and figuratively - the foundation of your fitness center, so making the wrong decision can be costly in more ways than one. Unfortunately, club owners often delay when choosing the flooring that will go into a club until the last minute, simply because there are so many other things to think about. Luckily, understanding the options in fitness club flooring simply requires spending a few minutes up front - which can save time and money down the road.

### STANDARDS

First, you should become familiar with DIN certification standards, which are used to measure whether or not a certain type of flooring complies with specific fitness center needs. DIN requirements include set standards for floor reaction to impact, suitability for bouncing balls, foot stability, behavior under a rolling load, and shock absorption. It's important to check to see how your floor measures up to the DIN standard, because each type of flooring, although different, is still equally critical to the success of the activities you plan to take place on it. Typically, group exercise floors need to be slightly softer to absorb some of the impact, while courts need to have less shock absorption so that balls can easily bounce. So even if the surface looks the same, what lies beneath it is very different.

### THE BREAKDOWN

Each area of the club has different minimum requirements when it comes to flooring needs. As with any big decision, make sure you evaluate all of the possibilities before you make a choice on flooring. Cost should factor heavily into your final decision, but also keep in mind that trying to skimp on the front end can cause expensive repercussions later on.

#### **Group Exercise/Court Areas:**

Although the term "group exercise" certainly encompasses a wide range of activities, including classes like aerobics and yoga, as well as court sports like basketball and racquetball, all of them require a very stable top surface. "If the flooring for these areas is improper," says Steve Chase, General Manager for Fitness Flooring, "it can lead not only to damage to the floor, but injury to your instructors and participants as well." In activities where there's a high level of impact on the flooring, the surface must be able to yield in order to absorb shock away from the participant and into the floor. Traditionally, a hardwood surface (usually maple or oak) with an underlying resilient layer (like foam or plywood and rubber pads) has been used, which allows the wood to move upon impact and spreads the shock beneath the surface. Today, Parterre Flooring Systems also offers a vinyl option that is described as durable and cost effective, and has an appearance that is very similar to traditional wood floors.

Although traditional hardwood like maple or oak still offer excellent surface choices for courts

and group exercise areas, a greener alternative has recently emerged in bamboo. While bamboo is a material that can be used much like any other hardwood, it is a much more rapidly renewable resource. Hardwood flooring manufacturers have always been good stewards of the environment, but the fact remains that after a tree is used for flooring, it takes forty to sixty years for another tree that is grown in its place to reach maturity. By contrast, bamboo can be harvested about every three to five years. The hardness of bamboo can vary, so be sure to check the hardness (called the Janka rating) compared to more traditional hardwoods like maple or oak. If the hardness is adequate, bamboo performs as well as any traditional maple flooring would. And while bamboo shares a natural blonde color with maple, it does not show darker streaks or knots, but will show "knuckles" from the cane of the bamboo or a very slight streaking.

According to Chase, when it comes to maintenance, bamboo and maple have common enemies in water and humidity. Both types of floors have about the same life expectancy as well, which is around fifty years, and both can be refinished a number of times. To protect your investment, try to maintain a constant level of humidity year round (between forty and sixty percent), remove spills from the surface as quickly as possible, and be careful how much liquid you use when cleaning the floor. A way to avoid the use of excess liquid when cleaning is provided by the Courtclean system. According to President Gerry Harris, "Most solid hardwood floors are high use areas. The daily buildup of tracked in dirt and debris can damage the finish, creating a slippery surface." Courtclean's unique "damp mop" application system allows for necessary cleaning and maintenance to be performed without using a traditional bucket and mop.

Bamboo and maple are comparable in price, at \$8-11 per square foot, and if flooring is pre-finished installation can usually be completed in just one day for group exercise areas, excluding courts, which take about a week. If the flooring is not pre-finished, the installation process can take four to five days, which means added downtime for your club. For years, logos have been painted onto basketball courts, which is pretty much standard these days, but when it comes to other group exercise areas, many participants find logos to be distracting.

### **Cardio & Strength Areas:**

Carpet used to be a top choice for cardio areas. It is fairly inexpensive, has aesthetic appeal, and provides greater sound absorption than other types of flooring. However, the cost is often mitigated by the fact that it doesn't hold up well in high traffic areas, and with the holding power it has when it comes to stains and bacteria, it's no surprise that many club owners look for other options, which they found in recycled and vulcanized rubber. Unlike carpet, rubber floors do not release small fibers that can be sucked into the motors of cardio machines.

Weight rooms have been using recycled rubber products for a long time, making them the first area to utilize an environmentally friendly flooring option. Initially, rubber manufacturers didn't necessarily set out to make a green product, they were simply making use of surplus reground rubber. Today, the idea of "green" products makes any gym increasingly more attractive to members.

A new generation of eco-friendly rubber flooring has now become available in the form of modular, molded tiles that are much more attractive than traditional rolled rubber flooring, and they also have much greater shock absorbing capabilities. According to Steve Chase, General Manager of Fitness Flooring, "The material is especially ideal for free weight areas, since it is

an inch or more thick and has a resilient architecture beneath a stable top surface. This design absorbs the impact of even very heavy weights being dropped on it."

Although modular tile rubber floors are considerably more expensive at \$8-10 per square foot than rolled rubber, which is around \$3-4 per square foot, the tiles allow for easy installation and reconfiguration - which translates to less downtime for your club. If one tile gets damaged, you have the ability to replace only that tile - the whole floor does not have to be replaced. In addition, modular tile floors typically come with an extended warranty and have a usable lifespan of around twenty years, while traditional rubber floors usually need to be replaced after about ten years in high traffic areas.

Rubber flooring is fairly easy to take care of, and in most cases only requires regular vacuuming and weekly wet mopping. Another option involves coating the rubber with a glaze that acts as a type of shield, making it easier to clean, but much like waxing a floor, it only lasts several months before it needs to be reapplied. Mondo USA offers a product that does not require the use of coatings or finishes, because although eco-friendly, it is not made from recycled material, making it less porous.

Rubber floors come in a variety of colors and designs, and personalized logos are a great way to enhance a club's presence. These are easy to do on a rubber floor, because they can be inlaid into the material, using a precise water jet cutting method that is extremely clean. With Everlast, Ecore International has also introduced new color patterns into the market, expanding the current pattern spectrum by using higher color percentages, new formulas and new visuals. What this means for club owners is the ability to easily get a more personalized look for every club.

## **WHY IT'S IMPORTANT**

Putting quality flooring in your club might seem expensive, but according to Chase, it just makes sense to invest in a quality floor up front. "The things we end up replacing the most are areas where the owners tried to get by cheaply, like putting down carpet in an aerobics area, or thin rubber in a free weight area, where the products were not best suited for the areas, but were probably less expensive in the short run," he says.

Retention plays another role in deciding when to update old floors that are showing excessive wear and tear. "People want to feel good when working out. If the environment is not clean, modern, well-designed, and aesthetically pleasing, the club will lose members," says Robert Dougherty, General Sales Manager of Surfacing for Ecore International, adding, "Since many people spend an average of 60 minutes a day working out at health clubs, it makes sense to invest in quality flooring that is tailored to the different areas throughout your club."

## **Resources:**

CourtClean  
[www.courtclean.com](http://www.courtclean.com)

Ecore International  
[www.ecoreintl.com](http://www.ecoreintl.com)

Fitness Flooring  
[www.fitnessfloors.com](http://www.fitnessfloors.com)

Mondo

[www.mondousa.com](http://www.mondousa.com)

Parterre Flooring Systems

[www.parterreflooring.com](http://www.parterreflooring.com)

Snaplock Industries

[www.snaplock.com](http://www.snaplock.com)