Wool has many significant advantages as a carpet fiber. Wool is soil-hiding, inherently flame resistant, low in static and also very resilient. There are, however, several misconceptions surrounding the care and maintenance of wool floor coverings. The following information addresses the most common of these beliefs.

What is Lanolin?

Floor covering dealers and others sometimes make reference to the “natural lanolin” in wool rugs and carpets, suggesting that this natural material plays a kind of magic role in the performance of the end product. “Lanolin” can be more accurately described as “wool grease”.

Up until the time the sheep are shorn, secretions from the sheep’s sebaceous glands (fat glands) create “wool grease”. In order to make the wool a serviceable fiber, this wool grease and other soils must first be removed. This cleaning process is called “scouring”. In the scouring process, the wool fibers are washed at temperatures above 120º F in order to melt the wool grease. Detergents are used to aid this process of stripping dirt and grease from the fiber. The grease is recovered from the scouring process and is refined to produce lanolin, a very common ingredient in skin care formulations.

One of the reasons scouring is so important is that residual wool grease tends to act as a soil magnet. Typically, the best quality of wool will have been thoroughly scour ed to achieve very low grease content. Wools of New Zealand, the United Kingdom-based marketing and research organization for New Zealand wool growers, emphasizes this fact by advertising the fact that New Zealand wool is low in grease content (below 0.5%), making it more soil resistant.

So, if you hear that a wool carpet or rug does not need a soil and stain repellent treatment because the fiber has natural lanolin, know that most of the “lanolin” has already been removed in order to prevent rapid soiling.

Does Lanolin Protect Against Staining?

We occasionally hear about comments from floor covering dealers who suggest that the lanolin in the wool can actually help prevent staining. It sounds good—kind of like another miracle of nature. Unfortunately, it’s simply not true.

Dyeing and staining are similar processes. As a matter of fact, we like to refer to dyeing as “controlled staining”. When a yarn or carpet is dyed in the mill, it is stained intentionally with dye. Take this concept into a home situation where Junior spills his fruit juice—the result is “uncontrolled dyeing.” We call it a stain.

Oriental rugs, kilims and other wool rugs and carpets are noted for their intricate designs and contrasts in colors. These colors and designs are readily achieved due to the ease with which wool accepts dyes. Should Kool-aid, coffee, or other dye-type substances be spilled
onto these rugs, they too will be accepted by the wool fiber. The result is a stain.

Oriental rugs deserve the finest care because they are more than area rugs, they are works of art and as such they need special care. Insure that oriental rugs are maintained properly and be sure they are protected with approved products.

Will Regular Cleaning Hurt My Wool Carpets and Rugs?

If you lived in a vacuum where dust, soils and spills were nonexistent, there would be no reason to clean your wool floor coverings. Unfortunately we don’t live in that kind of environment. All kinds of soils and spills are introduced into our interiors and most, at some point, come into contact with the floor coverings.

While spills can be unsightly in appearance, it is the everyday soil that can cause the most damage. The tiny dirt particles (even microscopic) can act like sandpaper and cause damage to the fibers. Timely, professional cleaning can minimize these harmful soils and lengthen the life of your wool floor coverings. Certainly, too-frequent cleaning can be harmful, especially if improper techniques and chemicals are used. Unfortunately, there is no timetable that can be used to predict when cleaning is necessary. Life-style, pets and location are just a few of the factors that need to be considered when deciding how often cleaning is necessary. However, if you wait until you can easily see the soil, you are already too late.

Trust the Experts

With proper care, wool fabrics can last for years. Vacuuming, rotating and flipping cushions and damp dusting are all tools that can effectively add life to these fabrics.

Several different Fiber-Seal products have been developed and approved for use on wool floor coverings. The Fiber-Seal Fabric Care System can benefit these fabrics by reducing absorbency, helping to resist permanent staining, and ultimately increasing the useful life of the fabric.

Designer’s Corner

Visit us online today at www.FiberSeal.com to find the local Service Center nearest you. Also, there are dozens of articles written on everything from Bamboo Fabrics to Flame Retardants. Drop by and see all of the FiberFacts and Textile Tip publications in Designer’s Corner.

You can also connect with us on our social media networks!

Need Help With Fabric Cleaning Or Fabric Protection?

Your local Fiber-Seal Service Center is ready to help and just a few clicks away... find out which one is closest to you by visiting www.FiberSeal.com/Locations.

Or, you can always give us a call at 214.333.9400 or email us at info@FiberSeal.com.