

STONE TILE CARE AND MAINTENANCE



OVERVIEW

The Tile Council of North America (TCNA) recommends specific maintenance practices for natural stone, focusing on routine cleaning with pH-neutral products, annual sealing, and immediate spill cleanup. The exact requirements can vary depending on the type of stone, its finish, and its location, such as floors versus wet areas.

ROUTINE CLEANING

Sweep or dust regularly: Use a soft-bristle broom, dry mop, or a soft lint-free cloth to remove loose dirt and abrasive particles that can scratch the surface.

Use pH-neutral cleaners: Mop or wipe the surface with a cleaner specifically formulated for natural stone and diluted with warm water according to the manufacturer's instructions. Harsh, acidic, or alkaline cleaners can etch or dull the stone's surface and damage the sealant.

Rinse and dry thoroughly: After cleaning, rinse the stone with clean water to remove any cleaner residue. Then, dry the surface with a soft cloth to prevent water spots and streaks.

Blot spills immediately: Promptly blot spills with a paper towel or clean cloth. Do not wipe, as this can spread the spill.

SEALING

Seal regularly: Most natural stone requires sealing to protect against stains and moisture penetration. The frequency of resealing depends on the stone type, location, and level of use. For example, shower tiles may need to be sealed every 4–6 months, while other areas may only require it annually.

Apply before and after grouting: For porous stone, a pre-grout sealer or grout release is applied to the tile face to prevent grout from staining the stone. After the final cleaning, a penetrating sealer is applied to both the stone and the grout joints.

Test the sealer: Always test the sealer on a small, inconspicuous area first to ensure the desired results.

Follow manufacturer's instructions: Sealers must be applied according to the manufacturer's directions for the best results and longevity.

AVOID AND ADDRESS COMMON ISSUES

Do not use harsh chemicals: Never use acidic cleaners (like vinegar or lemon juice), ammonia, bleach, or scouring powders on natural stone. Acids can etch calcareous stones like marble and limestone.

Be cautious with polishes and waxes: Avoid non-stone-specific oil-based, soap-based, or wax-based cleaners, as these can attract dirt and dull the finish.

Remove soap scum in wet areas: In showers and baths, minimize soap scum by drying surfaces with a squeegee or cloth after each use. A non-acidic, stone-safe soap scum remover can be used for deeper cleaning.

Address efflorescence: Efflorescence, a white residue caused by evaporating salts, can be brushed off. However, the underlying moisture issue must be addressed to prevent it from returning.

Use floor mats: For floors, place mats or rugs at entrances to reduce the amount of dirt and grit tracked in.

SPECIFIC INSTALLATION AND MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

While primarily for installation, the TCNA Handbook also includes important guidelines related to the long-term maintenance of specific materials:

Variability of natural stone: The TCNA highlights that natural stone is a product of nature, with inherent variations in color, texture, and other characteristics that are not defects.

Substrate flatness: The handbook emphasizes that a stable and properly prepared substrate is essential for the long-term performance and maintenance of stone tile installations.

Material compatibility: It is crucial to use setting materials and sealants that are compatible with your specific type of stone.