



Holiday Spot and Stain Removal

By Jeff Bishop

Ahhh . . . the holiday season is upon us. Fun, family, food . . . but wait a minute! What about all the tracked-in soil, and spots and stains that are left behind?

Well the news from the International Cleaning and Restoration Association (ICRA) is that life as you know it doesn't have to be over. You too can enjoy the holidays with a few simple tips from the ICRA.

First, what about all that tracked-in soil from outside?

It's as simple as vacuuming your carpet and rugs - even hard flooring - with a quality vacuum. Need a replacement for the old worn out vac? Take a virtual trip to the CRI web site (www.carpet-rug.org) and see the latest in CRI Seal of Approval (SOA) vacuums. There are about 200 listed and they've been tested for soil removal, filtering capability, and for their ability to maintain the texture and appearance of your carpet, long term.

Several rules for purchasing vacuums:

1. Not the cheapest, rather the best for durability and performance.
2. Use a high-efficiency filter bag or collection system to prevent aerosolizing soils.
3. Unless the vacuum has a floating head, be sure to set the pile height adjustment properly to avoid damage to carpet or rug pile yarns.

So what about holiday spots and stains, including food and beverage spills, many with artificial coloring added?

Foremost, don't hesitate to access your carpet's manufacturer for advice on maintaining their product. Most have very informative web sites with lots of good information.

Next, consult www.carpet-rug.org for a list of approved spotters that won't bleach carpet or leave resoiling residues.

Then, consider the principles of spotting that professional cleaners use:

1. **Respond quickly.** Generally, the longer you wait, the more complex the problem becomes.
2. **Remove the excess:** Do the easy things first. Using white paper towels, *blot* beverage spills; *scoop* up semi-solids (ketchup, mustard, gravy); *vacuum* up powdery residues (e.g., flower, sugars).
3. **Dissolve:** Many foods and beverages contain substances that can be dissolved: sugar, salt, many starches are easily dissolved with plain warm water. There are many CRI SOA spotters (detergents) that do a great job in this area as well. Even oily spots (from toys or foods; or just tracked in—oils from the garage) can be dissolved (emulsified) with well-formulated spotters.
4. **Suspend:** For spot components that can't be dissolved, use an approved spotter that's designed to lift and suspend pigment in carbon.

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5. **Rinse:** Just apply a little warm water and rinse. Even quality spotting agents can leave slight residues than can attract soil.
6. **Dye removal:** With olefin Berbers, or polyester or triexta friezes or plushes, staining simply isn't a problem. However, if a stain (added color) remains after spotting nylon or wool, it may be best to call a professional for help (www.certifiedcleaners.com; or 800.835.4624 on weekdays).

Certification is your assurance that the cleaner has specialized training in spot and stain removal, as well as overall cleaning.

OK. You have a good spotter that's been tested and approved, or one that's recommended by your carpet manufacturer. Now, what about spotting technique? Several rules to remember:

1. Again, get up the excess first. Blot, scoop, vacuum. This avoids spreading spots.
2. Drip-apply spotters; don't pour them on. That wastes spotter (and money) and potentially, it can damage backing adhesives. With dry solvents for grease, apply the spotter to a clean, white cloth and dab the spot to remove it progressively.
3. Tamp (up and down) spots, never scrub (back and forth) with spotting brushes, or even towels!
4. Apply the spotter and blot; then observe for transfer to a clean cloth. As long as the spot or stain transfers, keep repeat the process.
5. When transfer stops, blot the spot thoroughly; then sprinkle on a little warm water and blot some more.
6. Get the area dry. Not only does this prevent soil attraction, it also prevents a potential slip/fall hazard.

Finally:

1. Ammonia has a pH of about 12 - too aggressive for most nylon and wool. Also, it can remove the stain-resist treatment applied to carpet during manufacture.
2. White vinegar won't do much that plain water can't accomplish. Same for white wine - although if you drink it, that may improve your attitude while getting up the spot!
3. On nylon or wool, avoid bleaches (e.g., chlorinated, peroxide or anything with "oxy" on the label), which can easily remove color from most nylon or wool, or they can damage wool fiber.
4. Sometimes a spot or stain can re-appear or wick from backings to the surface of pile yarns. When this happens, simply repeat the spotting process (apply, blot, observe, rinse) until completely removed.

ICRA professionals recommend that you follow these spotting tips for a happier, less stressful holiday season.