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Pet Services JOURNAL

November/December 2008

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DOING IT RIGHT: PET CARE FACILITY CONSTRUCTION

BY AL LOCKER

Are you a little tired of everyone touting their pet care facility, products, and franchises as being "state of the art?" Just what does that mean, and are they really? Wikipedia defines "state of the art" as "the highest level of development, as of a device, technique, or scientific field, achieved at a particular time." It also applies to the level of development (as of a device, procedure, process, technique, or science) reached at any particular time, usually as a result of modern methods.

There are many fine pet care facilities, and products. Are they all completely "state of the art?" I guess it really doesn't matter. Most of us couldn't afford it (wouldn't make good business sense).

With that out of my system, let's look at some "good stuff" that's out there for us to use in our pet care centers.

FLOORING

One of my favorite construction subjects is flooring. My philosophy is that there is a set of different floors for each of the many different areas of your center. Of course, budget also is a factor but we're talking "state of the art."

The kennel and bathing/drying/grooming areas have to handle water, cleaning and the most abuse. The best flooring for these areas is a seamless "troweled epoxy" floor (also known as "resinous" or "poured" epoxy systems). This is not epoxy paint! It is an epoxy system consisting of an epoxy base, aggregate for color and slip resistance, plus top protective coats of urethane or acrylic. Costs run from \$5 to \$13 per square foot. It is impervious to moisture, urine, and chemicals, plus it is slip resistant. This tough-wearing easy-to-clean surface is widely used in labs, meat-cutting areas, hospitals, animal care facilities, sporting arenas, and commercial and industrial plants. The aggregate can make the floor any color, as slip resistant as desired and you can create any pattern. It can be applied over new or old concrete. It can be troweled up the wall, forming an integral cove base making a seamless waterproof connection from the floor to the wall. It has anti-microbial properties, and requires no periodic waxing, sealing, buffing, or refinishing. Trying to be "green?" This should qualify.

Still not exactly sure what this is? "Google" "troweled epoxy flooring" or "seamless epoxy flooring" for more information. As a side note, we have had this type of flooring in our pet resort for 12 years with no problems. Well, okay—one problem—this stuff lasts! So be sure you *really* like the color you pick! This truly is "state of the art" flooring for this application.



The Aqua Air wet vac system is a tried-and-true cleaning system originally designed for the restaurant business. Recently, it has found its way to the pet care industry. Once seen in action, it's easy to see what a labor-saving, water-saving, thorough cleaning system it is.

ENCLOSURES

Next, let's think about pet enclosures. There are many good pet enclosure vendors. Sometimes, however, in the effort to be state of the art or cutting edge, the new designs that solve some problems actually create others. Look for a minimum of cracks or crevices where cleaning would become difficult. (Most unpleasant "kennel smells" come from hidden bacteria growing in those hard-to-get-to hidden areas.)

Many enclosures have special innovations such as glass fronts, special easy-to-use latches, guillotine door pulley systems, resting benches, etc. However the "state of the art" portion of these new enclosures is the now wide use of HDPE (high density polyethylene) in their construction. This is the same product used for premium cutting boards and counters in many industrial and commercial applications, from meat packing plants to the kitchens of many of the finest restaurants.

This premium thermoplastic board is preferred in commercial food applications as it meets critical government regulations for food preparation and cleanliness criteria. It is virtually indestructible in terms of cracking, warping, chipping, peeling, and acid corrosion. HDPE will not absorb odors or moisture due to its molecular makeup, therefore cleaning agents and surface residue simply rinses away. Independent/government institutions agree that the best cleaning protocol for HDPE is washing using a hot soapy water solution and scrubbing with a brush. HDPE will not corrode, tuberculate, or support biological growth. It is impact resistant and is the material of choice in harsh chemical environments. It can be used for wall wainscot protection instead of epoxy paint on all wall surfaces. It can be used for mop area and walk-in shower area in place of tile or block. It maintains its color over the expected 50- to 100-year life expectancy. It comes in thicknesses of 1/16 to 3/4 inch, widths from 30 to 60 inches, lengths up to 300 feet, and now a selection of different colors. These lengths can greatly reduce the number of joints and, therefore, the number of places water can penetrate and bacteria, mold, and mildew can hide and grow. Its many colors add to a friendlier appearance.

CLEANING

Cleaning chemicals have evolved to become more environmentally safe. However, cleaning methods have really remained fundamentally unchanged for years until now. In the past, it's been hose, spray, mop, rinse, and squeegee. Sprayers have gotten better and have heat and chemical injections. However, they are still just water under pressure. A possible new state-of-the-art cleaning system is the "Aqua Air" wet vac system. It's a tried-and-true cleaning system originally designed for the restaurant business. Recently, it has found its way to the pet care industry. Once seen in action, it's easy to see what a labor-saving, water-saving, thorough cleaning system it is.

The system works as follows. It is similar to a carpet steam cleaner. There is a vacuum wand connected to a central vacuum. Hair, kibble, urine, and water all can be quickly vacuumed up with out spreading any of it. The cleaning chemicals are piped right to the wand and are easily sprayed directly onto the area to be cleaned. The cleaning and disinfecting solution can be rinsed and then immediately vacuumed up, leaving the enclosure virtually dry and ready for replacement of the pet to a dry enclosure. The use of this method lowers the amount of cross-contamination by flooding the area. The other real advantage is the limited amount of water needed to clean the kennel. It is a great solution for kennels on septic and water well systems to limit water usage and, therefore, the size of the septic systems and drain fields necessary to support them (helping us stay "green" and save the planet). I see water is our next scarce resource, and more regulations will eventually limit the amount available for use by many businesses. (The federal government already limits the amount of water for toilet and faucet use!) Conservation and rain water collection systems are already also being used. (To contact Aqua Air, please call [800] 916-5777 or visit www.aquaair-wetdry.com.)



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AIR EXCHANGES

Even though air exchanges are not really "state of the art" technology, proper air exchange, ventilation, and fresh air in your facility is necessary for it to be "state of the art" and provide a healthy and safe environment for your guests. Just as humans need proper ventilation, distribution, and fresh air, pet guests need it, too. The facility air needs to be regularly and thoroughly circulated, filtered, and conditioned, plus you need to change out the "used" air, replacing it with "fresh."

How much is needed? Seems like an easy question, but it also depends on your type of operation, including climate, cleaning protocol, and density of pets. First, the denser the facility (the more pets we have per square foot) the more air we will need. For example, a pet shop might house 100 animals in 500 square feet versus a pet resort that may only house 13 animals in the same space. Second, if pet waste is not picked up regularly and is just hosed down and around runs and trenches, there will be additional noxious odors that require ventilation. Third, we need to acclimatize the housing area for the type of pets you are boarding. If they are used to temperatures and conditions similar to their inside home environment, then we need to have heating and cooling systems to achieve that. Some say the best amount of fresh (outside air) is 100-percent fresh at varying rates from six to 18 times per hour. Most of us cannot afford that, so my recommendation is fresh air injection of at least 15 cfm (cubic feet per minute) for each person and pet. This is the normal requirement for humans. It takes into consideration the amount of "bodies" needing the air, automatically accounting for the density.

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SOUND CONTROL

Sound control has always been an issue with pet care centers. When new centers are proposed, communities are concerned about the noise and smell associated with these businesses. Kennels sure must have developed a bad reputation in the past. Proper sound control will change some of that for the future.

The best way to control sound is from the source. Modern designs and practices include isolation panels between runs, limiting the amount of dogs in any one space, and addressing traffic flow of the placing and caring of the dogs to limit disturbances, thus reducing the dogs' stress level (barking). These things reduce the amount of noise that requires mitigation.

That done, let's address the sound we can't eliminate by design. With sound, we have two problems. One is the Noise Reduction Coefficient (NRC) and the other is the Sound Transmission Class (STC). These simply are measurements of how well sound is absorbed, and the other how well sound is blocked, respectively. Unfortunately, for a kennel environment the harder materials and surfaces we use to withstand moisture and block sound from being heard on the outside are sound reflective and make our centers louder on the inside. So, we then try to add sound-absorbing materials that can still handle the moisture and absorb sound at the same time.

There are some new sound-absorbing products on the market that help us do both and are fairly economical. The first of these is sound-absorbing sheet rock. A brand name for it is "QuietRock" soundproof drywall. This is reflective, but not as much as, let's say, epoxy-coated concrete block. It allows sound to transfer through it. The new QuietRock has an inner layer of sound-deadening material that transfers sound waves into heat and dissipates them. This makes a couple layers of sheet rock as sound stopping as a concrete block

wall, and it deadens it also, not just reflecting it back into the inside. (For additional information about QuietRock soundproof drywall, visit www.quietsolution.com/html/quietrock.html.)

Windows have always been the leak in the sieve when it comes to sound. You can have a very sound-proof wall and add a couple windows in it, losing much of the effect. Why have windows? They are the emergency ventilation when the power fails, and they help us with adding enough natural light when compliance and the new federal energy code limit us. They can add to our being "green" by reducing the amount of artificial light necessary to light our centers, and as we all know, natural light is a stress reducer in humans and animals. Now there are windows with sound-reducing features to allow natural light in and keep noise from escaping. A brand name for these is "Soundproof Windows." Can't afford to replace your windows? Adding storm windows helps, and now there is a clear "heavy mass" vinyl that you can place in front of your existing windows that will help reduce noise transmission and still allow the light in. For that matter there are also "heavy mass" vinyls that can be placed inside of regular walls that are much more effective in reducing sound transmission from room or area to area than the older sound insulation batts, or sound board. A brand name for this is "Acoustiblok."

WATER- AND MOLD-RESISTANT DRYWALL

Since the mold scare of the '90s, work has been done in the construction industry to reduce the ability of mold to find places to grow. Drywall and exterior sheathing manufacturers have come up with "paperless" drywall that uses a fiberglass facing rather than paper, therefore not giving mold a food source on which to grow. They make some with mold and mildewicides in them. Also, they have made a hardened version called "aqua rock" to do something similar.

And, finally, there are advances in "nano" technology to eventually change the molecular structure as to be water repellent rather than absorptive. Of course, as we reduce the amount of water we use in our operations this will also reduce our susceptibility to mold and mildew-related problems.

FUTURE ENERGY TECHNOLOGY

It's not here for general use yet, but the future is bright for energy independence. Examples include geothermal for heating and air conditioning ground water at 200 feet that stays at a pretty constant temperature. Nano technology for electrical power, so eventually all metal roofs can be solar photoelectric generators. Wind-power-generating electric energy is yet another energy source. It's really an exciting time to see all the newer, better, and environmentally friendly ways to live.

The above items are certainly not all of the wonderful new "state of the art" construction technologies out there, but they include some that affect us the most. If you have any questions about any of these products, or if you've got another one you know about, write me at www.tki@aol.com. I'm always interested. 🐾

Al Locker is President of a third generation family owned, 48-year-old design/construction company. He and his wife, Suzanne, have owned ABC Pet Resort for 17 years. They are both members of PCSA, and ABC is a VFA accredited kennel. Suzanne is a PCSA CKO. She has been a regional director and ABKA President. Both Al and Suzanne served as co-chairs of the ABKA VFA Committee. To date, Al's design/construction pet resort experience includes designing 27 pet resorts around the country, consulting on an additional eight, and building 12 in the Houston metroplex area. His kennel designs have ranged in size from 2,500 square feet to 22,000 square feet. Some designs are "from ground up" construction, and others are existing buildings or leased spaces with build-out tenant improvements.

