

Acoustical Ceiling Restoration: An Attractive Alternative in Fast Track Store Remodeling

Is new always better? If you are referring toothbrushes and underwear, the answer is yes. But when it comes to dealing with aged/discolored acoustical ceilings, the answer may surprise you.

As compared to new tiles, and assuming the right product is used, a restored acoustical ceiling has:

- improved acoustics
- better light reflectance and color retention
- greater life expectancy

Retail store remodeling is typically completed between closing time (10 pm) and the morning arrival of store personnel (as early as 6 am). When removing and replacing acoustical ceilings, that envelope of time is seldom adequate to do more than one section per night, until the project is completed. In contrast, ceiling restoration offers:

1. Efficiency – It is common, in fully merchandised facilities, to restore 8 – 12,000 square feet of ceilings in one night, during that envelope of time described above. Larger contractors have been known to complete as much as 20,000 square feet in one night.
2. Appearance – The application of an acoustical coating results in a like-new finish that improves light reflectance and presents the option of designer colors.
3. Economics – Even in the case of inexpensive 2'x4' fissure tiles, ceiling restoration typically runs less than one-half of the cost of tile replacement and offers the advantage of refinishing the t-bar system and air diffusers at the same time with no additional expense.
4. Environment – By re-cycling the old ceiling, solid waste disposal is avoided as well as its related cost.

Selecting a Product

One must recognize the reasons for installing the ceiling system in the first place and make certain that those are not compromised. An acoustical ceiling tile system offers acoustical properties, a consistent color (usually white), and the ability to gain access above the ceiling by simply removing a tile. Traditional paints typically leave the tiles stuck to the t-bar system, reduce the acoustical values dramatically, and

depending on the product used, can make the ceiling more flammable. Therefore, it is best to specify a particular product in order to avoid the misuse of traditional paint systems, thus retaining a more natural appearance.

Undocumented claims made by manufacturers should not be accepted as necessarily true. If they state that their product will not damage the acoustical value of the ceiling, then the manufacturer should be able to provide supporting laboratory test data. If they suggest that their coating out-performs that of a new tile, results of testing should be available. A quality product of this type should be a Class-A fire retardant material and, if it does burn, should not give off emissions that are dangerous to life. Claims of improved light reflectance should also be substantiated. Of primary importance is that ***all testing must have been completed by independent testing laboratories and not by the manufacturer.*** Once a product has been applied to the ceiling, it cannot be removed, so buyers beware.

Identifying Qualified Contractors

The better product manufacturers are the ones who have been in business for some time and, as a result, are acquainted with the more professional ceiling restoration contractors in the country. Some have actually gone so far as to form a network of applicators and make that network available to retail chains through some rather innovative programs. If one is contacted by independent contractors who propose to restore ceilings, make certain that they will utilize the product you specify (that meets your criteria) and that they are experienced in completing projects in fully merchandised retail space. They should be able to provide at least five references of this type.

Summary

While acoustical ceiling restoration is not a panacea, it is cost effective, efficient, and avoids solid waste disposal. It is a system that is appropriate when the style of tile is not being changed and the old ceiling material is structurally sound (flat, dry, and whole).

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