



## Environmentally Sustainable Flooring

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Recently, there has been a great amount of industry focus on the development of environmentally sustainable products for health clubs. Clubs want to know that they are making increasingly environmentally sound decisions about what they buy, and want to know how their purchases are affecting the world. So what's new in green flooring products?

Let's look at the main two flooring systems that have been used in gyms for years — wood for court sports and group exercise, and rubber for free weight, selectorized and CV machine areas.

Wood is a naturally sustainable product — it comes from trees that can be replanted and re-grown to be harvested again. Rubber flooring, to a great degree, is now made with recycled rubber; chiefly reground tires. Sure, carpeting or vinyl flooring also appear in many gyms, but even these can be made with recycled content now.

That being said, there have been recent modifications that make these products even more sustainable. Now, virtually every one of the wood flooring companies buy their lumber from sustainable forests — those that replant new trees for every one that they cut.

Additionally, new, more rapidly renewable products like bamboo have made a presence in the market. Bamboo is actually classified as a grass, and grows like your lawn — you can cut it back regularly, but it quickly re-grows back to its normal height. Bamboo trees can be used for flooring about every 3-5 years, whereas most hardwoods require 60-80 years to grow to the height needed for use in flooring. Therefore, bamboo renews itself at a much more sustainable rate than hardwoods.

Recycled rubber has been used for fitness flooring since at least the 1970s. Back then, flooring was all black because that was the easiest color to produce from recycled tires. About 10 years later, in the 1980s, manufacturers started adding colored "flecks" into the mix, to give flooring at least some degree of aesthetic appeal. Over time, manufacturers have continued to develop increasingly more colorful solids and blends in thicker, more durable tiles, but these all still sit atop a solid resilient substructure of recycled material.

There's an additional challenge when selecting flooring from the current market. Not only does flooring need to be sustainable and truly green, it must be suited for the unique demands of fitness. Fitness flooring tends to endure more abuse than something that you might put in your home, so the products typically have to be more heavy duty and durable. For instance, products like cork have been popular among many residential customers of green flooring, but have not been embraced by fitness professionals because of the lack of durability.

Additionally, these products have to be constructed so that they meet the unique performance requirements of fitness — such as providing precise traction for rubber soled shoes, as well as shock absorption for the various activities that occur.

The search for more sustainable products continues to grow. Not just because the market wants them, but because it's the right thing to do for the planet. If your club is already using green products in its flooring, you should be unabashed in promoting that to your prospective members.

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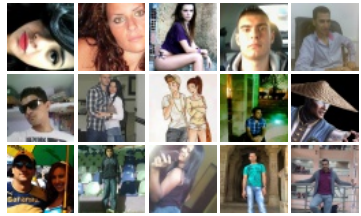


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