

# Yellowing: New Problem or New Awareness

By Joey Pickett

**R**ecently more and more carpet cleaners and consumers are reporting mysterious yellow spots appearing on carpet. The yellow spots sometimes appear before a carpet has ever been cleaned, but can also appear after cleaning.

What type of carpet or fibers are being plagued by these spots? Reports state the spots are appearing on lighter shades of stain resist carpet, on older nylon, olefin and polyester carpet, and even occasionally on wool.

The biggest question is: "What is the cause of yellowing?" Well, whatever the true cause or causes the witch hunt is on and the cleaners/consumers are looking for someone to blame when this condition arises.

Yellowing is not a new phenomena. Consumers, cleaners, mills and fiber producers have encountered yellow spots for years. So what are the possible causes of yellowing? The following are all choices:

- BHT is contained in synthetic backings manufactured prior to 1985. There is some speculation that BHT will off gas and cause yellow spots in confined areas which have low airflow.
- It is possible that yellowing may occur as a result of chemical residue from high pH cleaners, pesticides or deodorizers.
- Yellowing may result from spills of coffee, beer, mustard or cooking oil.
- Color loss by benzoyl peroxide or chlorine bleach can be a contributing factor. Also any driveway sealer tracked in or even soil may contribute to yellowing.
- Lighting can also be a source of yellowing due to the chromaticity of fluorescent bulbs, diffused light and light reflected off walls, paneling, etc.
- NO<sub>2</sub> - Nitrous oxides caused by combustion heat systems can attack the dye structure causing yellow spots to appear.
- And finally, what about the effect of stain resist treatments applied to the carpet at either the mill level or in the field by the cleaner? Is this possibly a new contributing factor yellowing? The jury is still out on this issue.

So how should we the professional carpet cleaners react and proceed? Allowing ourselves to become paranoid and upset won't help! Also, it surely won't make those yellow spots disappear! So, what is the solution?

What will make yellowing disappear in many cases is proper cleaning and treatment by a trained professional. Routinely, professional cleaners handle problems such as unknown spots, stains, odors, and browning, without a second thought. So surely, the professional can conquer some forms of yellowing also! Remember, the yellow spots which are caused by color loss or damage to dyes by bleach, fading and nitrous oxides are permanent and will not be improved by cleaning.

Yellowing caused by BHT, chemical residue, food spills or soil can be rinsed with a mild surfactant and treated. Mix a solution of 12 to 16 ounces U.S.P. grade citric acid powder per one gallon of warm water to treat 200 square feet. Rinse the area affected with a mild surfactant and spray the citric acid solution according to specifications. The solution should be agitated into the carpet pile with a soft bristle brush or carpet rake. Following this procedure will cause the yellowing to disappear! If the carpet feels slightly stiff or sticky upon drying, simply agitate the area and vacuum. This will restore the carpet to its original texture and hand.

Finally, what about over application of stain resist treatments? Current information reveals that any excess application of stain resist chemical is removed by recleaning and if necessary treating the area with citric acid. Therefore, professional carpet cleaning and proper treatment should solve this problem also.

There you have it. The choice is yours. You can join the witch hunt and point fingers or you can step forward and be part of the solution. □ PCJ

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