

Help and advice



Terry Wolfe on moisture measurement

Action needed over conflicting readings

I READ the President John Alcock's column in October with considerable interest. **CFJ**

There are two matters he raised: Firstly, do disclaimer letters hold water? Secondly, main contractors' reluctance to accept that a surface dpm is required.

John clearly differentiates in his article between lay clients and professionals (architects, surveyors main contractors).

In the case of lay clients, I doubt any disclaimer is possible, unless specifically drawn up by a solicitor stating, in very clear terms, that the floor WILL fail if laid without the surface dpm.

That it MIGHT fail will not do. Lay clients would include individuals like the premises manager of a school, who might be deemed not to have sufficient knowledge to understand the implications.

Professional clients and main contractors are much more straightforward. They would be deemed to have sufficient knowledge.

The members' section of the CFA website contains a letter of indemnity, drawn up by solicitors, for this purpose, which has never been defeated in court.



I was in Carlisle recently and had the opportunity to visit a leading local flooring contractor and CFA member, Edenside Carpets.

Alan Matthews of Edenside told me he had used the CFA disclaimer letters on several occasions, and was extremely pleased with the results.

It is worth digressing here, because I was very impressed with Edenside's approach to flooring after-care. I have often advocated being sure customers have good after-care and maintenance instructions.

Edenside go one step further. They give all wood flooring customers a digital hygrometer/

thermometer/clock (see photo on the left) which enables the customer to ensure his floor is kept in the optimum atmospheric conditions (rh 45-60%).

They also provide a small humidifier so that, if humidity levels drop in winter, their customer can ensure his wood floor does not shrink excessively. Edenside obtains these from Gründorf. What a good idea!

Returning to the points raised by John Alcock, the second aspect is much more complex. I have been involved, on several occasions, in disputes regarding the need, or otherwise, of a surface dpm.

Part of the problem stems from the method of testing. BS8203:2001 specifies the use of a surface hygrometer. This can be the traditional hair hygrometer, which requires calibration prior to each use.

The new F Ball digital hygrometer, which does not require calibration, perhaps makes this much easier.

Alternatively, the humidity boxes supplied by Tramex and Protimeter with F Ball, used in conjunction with the respective manufacturer's hygrometer stick and electronic meter, provide

accepted results too.

Discrepancies often result from the use of hygrometer sleeves. These are often substituted for surface boxes, because they are less easily disturbed after placement, and can be easily posted to contractors for installation prior to testing.

Humidity levels are then read using the Tramex or Protimeter hygrometer sticks, again connected to the respective manufacturer's electronic meter.

The difficulty arises when these sleeve readings are challenged with surface box readings, which are often >10% lower.

I have encountered several cases where the dpm manufacturer has gone into a site with sleeves and obtained readings of >90%. The main contractor has then called in his own independent testing station, who, using surface boxes, have produced readings <75%.

As I have said before, this is a discrepancy that ought to be addressed by the meter manufacturers. **CFJ**

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David Gatfield on floor preparation

Do you rip up the floor, or overlay?

A QUESTION coming up more and more frequently on our technical hotline concerns the practicalities of overlaying an existing flooring installation rather than the normal practice of ripping up and starting again.

So I thought I'd open up a can of worms and see what the general consensus of opinion is.

I'm a traditionalist myself, having been a floor layer for almost 40 years, going back to the days when preparation was recognised as the single most important element of the installation.

This is an ethos I still firmly believe in, in my opinion, get the preparation wrong and the job is on a slippery slope.

Even if you get it passed and get away from site, the chances

are that serious faults will arise before the defects period has expired. And as we all know, you can be held accountable for a latent defect discovered long after that.

So why would you want to jeopardise your chances of a successful outcome by laying over someone else's work? Good question.

As a general rule, I would always say that the best course of action is to rip up the existing flooring in every case. I'd even go as far as to say that as much of the degraded adhesive should be removed as possible, although I acknowledge this is seldom done.

Obviously there are exceptions to every rule and this one is no different.

Here are some examples of situations where we have examined the possibility of overlaying the existing installation - with caveats!

1. When there is genuinely not enough time to rip up and screed prior to installing the new floor. For instance, in a busy hotel kitchen or fast food outlet where the work is normally carried out at night and the flooring has to be replaced and fit for use at 6am.

2. There's no chance of latex screed drying fully to enable the flooring to be laid and hot welded. At best the latex would be surface dry but not cured, adhesives would not bond to the damp screed and the installation would be inherently weak.

Failure would be a matter of when, rather than if.

In this instance there may be a case for thoroughly degreasing the existing floor covering and bonding direct with a two part adhesive (obviously not to ceramic tiles) provided the existing system is sound and the reason for replacement is only to upgrade it. Not always feasible but on occasions a useful strategy.

We've also had a spate of calls recently about overlaying vinyl asbestos tiles. There are still many public buildings around the country where this type of tile was used right up until the early 80s.

They were so hard wearing that there are still millions of them around today and it's a problem when it comes to removal.

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