



Dr Paul Lemon The Slips Doctor

New series

Can I rely on national standard tests?

LAST year I wrote a series of articles in **CFJ** on floor surface slipperiness. Now, I'm starting a regular 'question & answer' column. Don't suffer in silence ... the answers to your questions are waiting!

Q: I'm specifying and installing a ceramic floor in a nursing home kitchen; the supplier has told me that the product I intend to use has passed a German slipperiness standard. So it should be slip resistant, right?

A: Well, it has passed a national standard test, so you could rightly hope that it is slip resistant for the particular conditions the test looks at.

It is possible to specify floors correctly based on information from Standards, but decisions should be made very carefully as there are several points to consider, in particular whether the standards apply to the relevant conditions – kitchens in your case.

The German standard test is one of two. The DIN 51097 test assesses how a floor behaves when it is contaminated with soapy water and used by barefoot



pedestrians. The DIN 51130 test is similar, but uses motor oil contamination and heavy work boots.

I've been involved in a number of cases where people have slipped in nursing home kitchens (one where slipping caused a death). In all my experience, I have never seen anyone barefoot in such a kitchen, or wearing heavy work boots! It's far more likely that people using the floor will be wearing sensible, flat-soled, closed-toe footwear.

As a result, the readings from either of the German Standards won't tell you what you need to

Do you have a question for The Slips Doctor?
Email: alancfj@btconnect.com

know for kitchen environments. They will tell you, however, whether or not you can use the floor in a walk-in shower area, or in a MOT test station!

A way forward is to have a sample of the floor installed as normal, including any grouting and finishing necessarily before the floor is used. The pendulum test should then be used on the sample. This should give you an accurate idea of how slippery the surface will be during use.

The tester (who should ideally be a member of the UK Slip Resistance Group) should use the contaminants you'd normally expect to find.

These could include clean water, dishwashing solution and cooking oils. Of course, you wouldn't expect to have tests undertaken for every floor you install, so the manufacturers or suppliers should have access to this information for each type of flooring available.

The advantage of this approach is that you'll make accidents less likely by following good practice.

Also, you'll know that if someone does slip on the floor you'll be able to demonstrate you followed good practice. Indeed when HSE does investigate slip accidents, one of our team of HSL scientists is often involved – in order to use the pendulum test in line with the UK Slip Resistance Group guidelines.

Generating accurate data sooner rather than later makes a lot of sense. It's far better to find out that you need to install a more slip resistant product before, rather than after someone slips. **CFJ**

Dr Paul Lemon is a senior scientist at HSL, HSE's in-house laboratory, and has specialised in floor surface slipperiness for over a decade. He is currently leading the largest ever HSE research project into flooring slipperiness.



Martin Cummins on questionable product claims

Small print can give the big answers

THE flooring industry, like other sectors, has been hit by the 'credit crunch'. So, in order to win projects and retain reasonable profitability, you may be tempted to cut corners. Don't! Otherwise you'll be building up to a crunch of your own.

What got me thinking about this was not a cynical view of the flooring contractor, but rather how he could be easily misled into cutting corners.

I was reviewing some datasheets out there (life in technical is never dull!) and looking at the headline boasts and claims that surround many products; some are extremely impressive and tempting.

Often we get a call from one of our sales managers extolling the claimed benefits of a new product from J Bloggs, who claims that it

does everything bar mix itself (there's a thought!!).

They usually conclude with the request 'can we have one in our range?' But the trouble is they have only read the glossy advert or the large bullet points.

Marketing 1: Technical 0

So just as these marketing headlines catch the eye with the lure of potentially savings of many pounds per sq m or time on-site savings; my question is what are the possible consequences of following these product claims?

I recently saw one datasheet that opened with a page of major bullet points. Topping the list of benefits and features was a statement 'No need to prime.'

Further down the document there was the small print which, let's be fair, few of us take the

time and trouble to wade through after we've honed in on the answer we need.

Anyway, the small print contained the contradictory statement 'may need to prime.' So what is the real situation?

The thing is, possibly with this particular product and with others such as the high solid content latexes or the high polymer content water mixes, they may perform adequately well in some circumstances, when you can get away without priming (and there are situations when the benefits of priming are not significant). But do you know when these situations are?

What about those projects where priming is imperative and failure to prime will cause short or long term problems?

Clearly the manufacturer is

rightly protecting itself and its products with the small print and correctly throwing the responsibility at the contractor.

You are the person on-site and know the job, so it is right that it should be your responsibility. However, it is all too easy to be complacent when the lure of the tender is dangling in front of you; it can be easy to choose the option which 'apparently' makes life easier and can make the job cost cheaper (or margins better).

From my experience on many sites where there has been a flooring failure there is usually something that has not been done in accordance with the datasheet.

Errors include applying the adhesive with the wrong trowel, late placement of the

Continued on page 38