



Martin Cummins on underfloor heating

Let's look at how to do things differently

THIS year I thought I would focus my columns on some of the more popular topics and issues that we come across in our technical capacity, but rather than look at what goes wrong, I thought I'd consider how we could do things differently.

Technical as a role is often very much a black and white approach...you can do 'A' but can't do 'B' with the emphasis placed on protecting the performance of our own individual product (or products).

This makes those in the technical department the bad boys who restrict contractors and sales reps and prevents them doing or selling. We learn to live with this and a good technical service manager always puts the pros and cons to any suggested deviations from the norm.

However, the nature of flooring is such that it is constantly changing, whether it is different types of screeds, new types of adhesives, developments in floorcoverings etc, so perhaps we should consider if changes to the norm can be made.

One example, is the rapid growth in underfloor heating systems (UFH). By UFH I am referring to warm water systems within screeds and not the undertile heating which uses radiant mats on the screed surface. This is an important distinction.

Take the case where UFH is the sole source of heating within a building. Unless changed recently, according to British Standards the UFH has to be turned off 48 hours before a flooring installation and then brought on slowly 48 hours afterwards.

Now if the UFH is off there is effectively no heating in the building, which is obviously

problematic for installing flooring products in colder weather (i.e. nine months of the year in UK).

Take vinyl flooring as an example. Look at all the installation guides such as BS 8203 Code of Practice, information from the Contract Flooring Association (CFA) and the main manufacturers; they typically all say that for vinyl installations you need a minimum of 18degC to store the vinyl beforehand and 18 to 26degC for 24 hours after laying.

To get this temperature you must introduce heat, which usually means bringing in an external means such as red rads, a costly and localised heating system that floorlayers generally do not have in the back of their vans.

Depending on how they are distributed, the heaters may only warm a small portion of the floor surface, so when the installation is taking place the vinyl may be cooling down quite quickly, exactly at the time when the adhesive is at its lowest strength.

Floor temperatures as low as 5degC are not uncommon in the UK so why not utilise the best type of heating for flooring – the UFH – which both warms the floor and also the room and therefore the vinyl and the adhesives?

I know the capability of our adhesives; we actually conduct all standard tests at 23degC so we know they can work at these temperatures. The vinyl will not be subject to rapid changes in temperature, ie when the heating is removed and temperatures plummet.

This would also help the contractor and put

the onus on the main contractor getting his building up and running. Even if the heating is only at setback it gives better controlled conditions for the installer and for the products.

So why isn't this approach taken? I believe that it's because we are all a bit too parochial, not wanting to change and not wanting to look at improving the overall flooring installation.

We are all very good at responding to specific needs, trends and legislations with regard to our own products (e.g., solvent free, anti-slip, low chromate etc.) but don't really look at how we can respond in a holistic manner to changes in building, construction and design to help the contractor.

If there are genuine technical reasons for not doing this I welcome feedback on this.

Meanwhile do we continue to rest on our laurels and carry on the way we always have, or take a fresh look?

British Standards are after all ONLY a code of practise on how to install a floorcovering, and no guarantee of a successful install, although manufacturers guarantee a product if the BS code of practise is followed. Maybe we should reflect more on the real world and prevailing site conditions a contractor faces and not be quite so prescriptive.

Maybe what's needed is a re-think of some of the issues like this and get together to arrive at a sensible solution. What are the chances? **CFJ**

Martin Cummins is technical training manager at Laybond

■ T: 01244 674774



John Roberts tests workwear

The long and the short of Snickers trousers

THE Snickers floorlayers trousers I tested come in one colour, grey. This would not be my first choice of colour, but I was surprised that, although light they did not show the marks as much as I thought they might.

The trousers were comfortable to wear and washed well. I have not noticed any colour or size change from regular washing. The kneepad pocket is on the inside with no outside openings.

The problem I found was not being able to insert the kneepads whilst wearing the trousers. Other people say they leave the pads in, with some even washing with them in. Leaving the pads in

whilst travelling short distances is not a problem, but if you are far from home, taking the kneepads out allows your knees to cool down and feel more comfortable whilst driving. The kneepad area is reinforced fabric that is strong and flexible.

I used these trousers on many types of subfloors, including rough concrete and to date they have withstood the relatively rough treatment, with no sign of wear. There is a string adjustment at the kneepad level, to keep the pads close to your knee and in position. I found I did not need to use the string but this may be useful for some wearers.

Personally I do not like straps around my knees.

There were many pockets including the Flexi-Pockets. There are different opinions about these pockets, some like them and others don't. If not required they can be inserted into the fixed pockets or removed easily if not required.

Snickers offers a good selection of sizes from short to long leg and waist sizes from 28in to 41in. I tested the patented kneepads, designed for Snickers floorlayers trousers 5223, that are made of polyethylene balls, beads that make the kneepads lightweight and breathable, keep

their shape and position and are designed not to slide.

I did find them lighter than other kneepads I have used and although breathable, I they do make the knees sweat more than other types. However, they keep their shape and do not slide. But due to the thickness of the kneepads, I found the trousers felt tight around the knees. **CFJ**

John Roberts founded TAOFS (The Academy of Flooring Skills) and is a prominent consultant in flooring. TAOFS offers training in all types of floorcoverings.

■ E: john@taofs.co.uk

■ www.taofs.co.uk

■ T: 07831 584334