



John Roberts on bond strength to subfloor

Here's where many fitters come unstuck

CONSULTANTS are obviously only called out to investigate failures on installations of floorcoverings. These tend to fall into many categories, including moisture (the most common), fraying joins in carpets, wood cupping and lifting, vinyl bubbling, poor pattern matching, smoothing compounds that have broken up or delaminated from the screed and many more.

I have inspected numerous installations where the bond to the subfloor is the main cause of the problem. These failures can be caused by products moving with changes in the atmosphere, creating stresses the bond cannot cope with.

I have also had a number of phone calls from installers, who have asked for advice on using adhesive directly onto asphalt subfloors.

All of these problems fall into the same category, in that the strength of the bond is only as good as the subfloor you are working with.

There are manufacturers who state that their products can be applied directly onto asphalt! They would not state this if it was not true, but you must consider the strength of the bond.

If you are installing a product which will move with changes in the atmosphere, which includes most products, you have to decide, will these products cope with this movement. When products move they exert

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stresses on the whole installation including smoothing skims, adhesives, etc, and will break down at the weakest point.

Let's look at the general specification / application of products on asphalt. They will normally state the subfloor must be dry which it should be, unless the asphalt has been broken (carpet fitters who nail gripper into asphalt cracking the floor).

They should also be contaminate free, including grease and any other substance, which could affect the bond. I have come across asphalt that has been polished by the customer.

This would dramatically affect the bond strength, if not removed. There may be other contaminants, such as old adhesive residues from installers who have not considered the strength issue or have installed a product that may not be adversely affected.

Consider also spillages of liquids generally used in a house like washing up liquid or in

the workplace like paint spillages and any substance that has been used, to remove the spillage etc.

There are a number of manufacturers who don't clearly state this. Before applying adhesives or smoothing compounds you should degrease the asphalt. This very factor has been the downfall of a few installations I have inspected.

To be fair to some of the manufacturers, they do state (as mentioned above) grease-free etc, but in my opinion they should clearly advise degreasing.

Installers, please understand that a manufacturer cannot state everything on their literature, so you must have sufficient knowledge before applying the product. In case of uncertainty, phone or email the manufacturers for technical advice. Why take risks!

I would also welcome the views of manufacturers. **CFJ**

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

Look out for courses covering moisture surveying skills at a venue near to you soon.

- www.taofs.co.uk
- [E: john@taofs.co.uk](mailto:john@taofs.co.uk)

Further information on
 ■ **T: 07831 584334**



David Gatfield on the importance of training

Why fitter training is a two-way street

WE all know that the current recession has hit the construction industry hard, and as more and more flooring contractors compete for fewer and fewer jobs, making sure that service levels and quality standards remain high is more important than ever.

The current economic climate has really driven up the importance of having the right skills and expertise to differentiate you from the competition, ensure a happy, satisfied customer and hopefully secure repeat business.

There are numerous resources out there to help contractors deliver a first rate service to customers. For example, our technical services department is on hand to offer on site help, arbitration, fitting advice, help

with specifications etc. Most manufacturers also offer installation guides, after all, it's in our own interests to help contractors make products look as good as possible.

But when it comes to really raising the bar for installation standards and helping to ensure quality flooring companies survive the current economic downturn, training is key.

With continuing technological advances, now more than ever, it pays to keep up to speed with new techniques and materials. It's never too late to learn, honing your skills can prepare you to face the most challenging installation and even experienced flooring professionals can reap the rewards of brushing up their skills.

Our contractor training school at Letchworth offers practical training sessions run by highly skilled ex-fitters.

As well as these specialist courses, less formal, tailored training sessions at contractors' or distributors premises are also increasingly in demand and more and more people are using the installation videos which can now be viewed on our YouTube site.

Forming and welding mitres are particularly popular topics as it's the fine detailing that has the greatest potential for going wrong and spoiling an otherwise good job.

But it's also worth remembering that training is a two way street that can benefit manufacturers too. Today's flooring contractors are different, the trade has come

of age and at last quality flooring companies or highly skilled individuals are justly recognised for their ability and contribution in helping to make manufacturers products look their best.

I value my continued contact with contractors through the training school and technical support as it keeps me in touch with the challenges you all face day to day.

It is by keeping in touch with all aspects of the industry that we can work together to raise product, service and skill standards. Ultimately, that will be good for all of us – and our bottom lines. **CFJ**

David Gatfield is Altro's technical services manager

Further information on
 ■ **T: 01462 489405**