



Neil Sanders answers readers' queries

Your big questions on moisture testing

HERE are the answers to some of the questions from readers of **CFJ**:

1. Why should I test a subfloor for moisture?

Prior to installing a resilient or textile floorcovering, it is essential to ensure that the subfloor incorporates an effective damp proof membrane, in accordance with British Standards BS 8203 and BS 5325, respectively.

Moisture testing is performed by measuring the Relative Humidity (RH) level within a subfloor.

Where the RH is above 75%, the installation should not proceed as excess moisture in the floor can result in blistering of the floorcovering or complete failure of the flooring installation. This may result in expensive and lengthy remedial work, including the possibility of a costly 'rip out'.

2. What is the most accurate method of testing for moisture within a subfloor?

All floors need to be carefully

examined for moisture. The visual inspection of a subfloor is inadequate as the surface may appear dry, but excess moisture may still be present.

In the first instance, an indicative test using a radio frequency moisture meter offers a quick and easy method of testing moisture levels. If no moisture is present, the flooring installation can proceed as planned.

However, if the meter indicates that a subfloor contains moisture, further investigation is required to ensure the identification of an appropriate treatment.

To accurately assess the level of moisture in the subfloor and in accordance with the British Codes of Practice BS 8203, BS 5325 and BS 8201, it is recommended that a non-invasive method is used for moisture testing, such as a calibrated digital hygrometer.

Temporarily sealed to the floor to isolate the device from the surrounding air, a digital

hygrometer provides a direct reading of the RH. Measurements should be made at a number of points across a floor once the air inside the meter is in equilibrium with the surrounding air.

Equilibrium can be assumed when two matching consecutive readings are taken over 24 hours.

Where RH levels are measured at below 75%, the surface is considered sufficiently dry to receive the floorcovering and the installation can proceed without further treatment.

As wood floors are particularly sensitive to moisture, F. Ball recommends a maximum RH level of 65% without applying a waterproof surface treatment. Contractors should seek advice from the flooring manufacturer before proceeding.

3. Which types of subfloor poses most risk of moisture?

As the installation of a damp proof membrane in new buildings only became mandatory in 1965, the ground floor levels of

buildings which were constructed before this date should be subjected to a moisture measurement test.

Moreover, if a building has been compromised by a leak, the floors in a building should be tested, even if they are above ground floor level.

New buildings will incorporate a damp proof membrane, but they still remain susceptible to moisture as the drying time of a new sand/cement screed estimated at 1mm per day up to a thickness of 50mm.

As a 150mm thick concrete subfloor can take up to a year to dry out naturally, to ensure that a concrete subfloor is sufficiently dry to receive a floorcovering, all new build projects should be tested for moisture. **CFJ**

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Terry Wolfe visits a surface preparation products manufacturer

Despite Italian roots, Mapei has British bias

AS regular readers of my column know, I occasionally visit major manufacturers to ascertain what they are doing for themselves and for the flooring industry.

So far this has included such companies as Protimeter, F Ball, Atkinson & Kirby, and STS Flooring Distributors, to name a few.

This month, I visited Mapei. Why, because I have been coming across Mapei products on more and more sites, and I felt it would interest me, and hopefully **CFJ** readers, to know a little more about the company and its products.

I'm glad that I did because I found my meeting with Graham Baldwin, Mapei's product manager for the resilient sector, both fascinating and informative.

Mapei (UK) is part of the international Mapei group. Founded in Italy 72 years ago by Rodolfo Squinzi, the company is still owned by the Squinzi family. The CEO is Rodolfo's son Giorgio, with his own son, wife and daughter involved in the company, ensuring its succession to the next generation.



Dr Squinzi firmly believes in promoting each of his companies within its own region or country, so that Mapei (UK) is run as a British company, buying many of its raw materials in this country and manufacturing much of its stock in its Halesowen factory, where over 120 British people are employed.

Mapei (UK) has the benefit of the worldwide group, which overall employs over 5,300 people, providing an excellent product source and technical back-up.

Graham showed me the laboratory where products are

tested, telling me that Mapei testing is uniform throughout the group; this laboratory is duplicated at every Mapei factory.

I also toured the factory (above) and warehouse, seeing the automated machinery which produces adhesives and screeds.

Despite the present economic climate, Mapei is in the course of a major expansion and extension of its factory and warehouse.

They have a strategic plan, and are not being diverted from it.

One of the questions I ask companies I visit, is what they are doing to improve the flooring

industry.

In reply, Graham told me about screeding products which permit the installation of floorcoverings just a few hours after application, useful in today's rushed world.

He also showed me a new surface dpm which permits the application of smoothing / levelling compounds or floorlaying within hours. He added that this preoccupation with speed, which has become the norm in the UK, is not shared in many European countries.

He believes that many European countries are more amenable to change whereas our market is resistant to change, sometimes to its own detriment.

All in all, I learnt a lot from Graham, about his company, its philosophy and its products and I hope I have passed some of that on to you. **CFJ**

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