



Martin Cummins on good and bad practices

A tale of two very different building sites

SITE 1: IT was about 3degC outside when I arrived at the site. I traipsed over the muddy ground to the security guy in the Portacabin to ask for the person I was due to meet.

I was told he was 'on-site' and that I could go and look for him. After climbing several flights of stairs and around most of the construction, I eventually found him in one of the cold corridors. I am here to do the moisture test, I tell him.

He tells me where to put the hygrometers; 'here, here and here' - the three sections the flooring contractors were due to start on.

So I placed the hygrometers where shown; I then enquired when the flooring contractors were due to start? 'Next week!'

'It's a bit cold for the installation, isn't it?' I commented. Some heating would be brought in for the installers, he said. I was shown a Red Rad heater in a room where the doors were sealed off with thick insulation board; it was nice and warm.

A few days later I returned and the hygrometer readings indicated the floor was soaking wet. I find the main contractor's man again to let him know the score.

'Yeah, I thought they would be,' he said, adding 'I don't know why the architects don't specify a bit of membrane. The windows won't be in for ages.'

The wind was driving through the building; it was raining and it was freezing cold. The subfloor would never dry in time for the floorlayers! So I've now got to add extra costs to the contract for the flooring contractor to sort it - it's stupid!

SITE 2: Large school, two floors: I arrived at the gate, where I was directed to the Portacabin and told to wait there until somebody comes to get me signed in.

I show my CSCS card and in this instance I didn't have to do an induction, but I was escorted on-site to meet the flooring contractor responsible for the installation.

He took me to the rooms where

"I don't know why the architects don't specify a bit of membrane. The windows won't be in for ages," said the main contractor's man. The wind was driving through the building; it was raining and freezing cold; the subfloor will never dry in time for the floorlayers'

he wanted moisture readings taken - the areas he would be next working on. He pointed to the best places to put the hygrometers, where they would not get damaged or disturbed (corner of one room and two corridors).

Later the main contractor asked where the hygrometers had been located, when I would be back to take the readings and was it OK for them to look at the readings?

He was genuinely interested and went through everything with me. I mentioned the locations of the hygrometers and that other trades need to take care not to disturb them.

Immediately he offered: 'I'll get the hygrometers coned off'. He obviously wanted to get genuine results from these tests. It was still fairly cold, but there were Red Rads dotted around the place; windows were in and the site was well lit and organised.

I returned a few days later and two of the three hygrometers were dry. The main contractor explained where the high readings were; they had a flood from the sprinkler system early on.

In the latter case the screed was calcium sulphate, the one that is perceived to be problematic, but the main contractor had done all he could to get it dry and had succeeded.

■ Comparison: The first site was a sand cement screed, which everybody knows is never going to be dry in time. So the initial assumption appears to be that they will put up with any old conditions as they'll end up installing a membrane anyway.

In both cases the main contractors, contrary to what

most people think, generally knew the score, having dealt with enough floors.

Incidentally, on the first site the original contact had been from the architect, questioning the limitations of the specified materials. The requirements for performance were spelled out to him, including temperature minimums, etc.

This then put the flooring contractor in a quandary as he had 'not included allowances for heating to keep the environment at reasonable temperatures as this may have cost him the tender.'

But now he was losing some of his profit.

I understand this comment. He is right in saying that he should not be told how to do the job as it is he who will guarantee the installation. However, when you get called in six months later to sort out problems, it becomes hard for you to defend the

installation, knowing that corners have been cut.

Obviously, no two sites are the same and can be very different, even including the approach to health & safety.

The point is that despite the differences - even with the assumption in the first case that it would be wet when the flooring contractor started - there were still common issues on site conditions, particularly ensuring correct application of the DPM and the provision of heating, etc.

In the second example, the approach was to do the job right from the outset - whether this was due to the use of calcium sulphate or the main contractor simply wanting to do what was needed for the job to run smoothly.

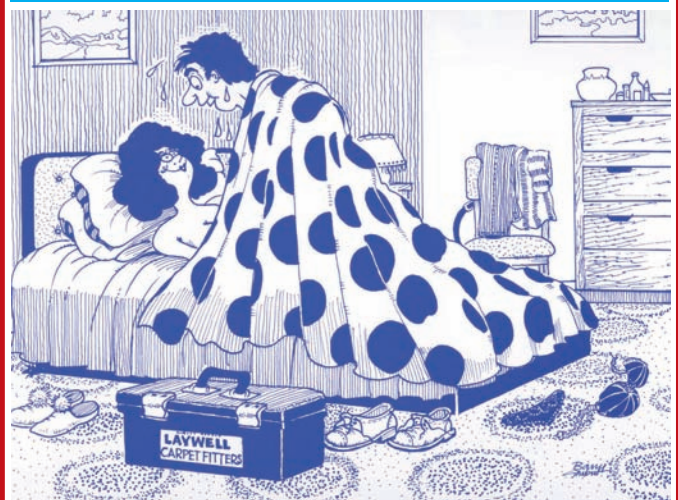
As a manufacturer, we supply materials to do a function, but they need to be used correctly.

So the sooner we can get architects to understand the real issues on sites and both main and flooring contractors to accept that we are not trying to milk their profit margins, the better for the industry as a whole. As you can see from these two sites, the approach at present can be like chalk and cheese. **CFJ**

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The funny side of flooring



'I have to admit, Miss Jones, the underlay you supply is even better than ours!'

By courtesy of

