



John Roberts on underfloor heating

UF heating keeps complaints on the boil!

SINCE my article last year about underfloor heating versus adhesives, complaints have rolled in. There are still many people who test floors for moisture whilst the underfloor heating is still on.

This, of course, gives a low reading. As I pointed out underfloor heating should be off for at least 48 hours before setting the hygrometer.

Once set, readings need to be taken over several days. Do not rely on pin-type moisture meters as these initially give a dry reading when the underfloor heating has been off for a few hours.

I recently recorded a moisture content of less than 0.4% in a sand and cement screed. This dryness effects the floorcovering installation. It is generally accepted that when a product or substance is placed in contact with a substrate that is considerably drier, any moisture will travel from the wettest material into the driest material until equilibrium is achieved.

Some material such as carpets, should be able to cope with minimal effects, but if you are using adhesives, some moisture from the adhesive will be absorbed into the substrate,

‘Wood flooring is still top of the list for problems over underfloor heating’

reducing the strength and effectiveness of the adhesive.

There are, of course, some adhesives which are moisture curing. These adhesives tend to perform better when there is some moisture in the subfloor. Moisture must, of course, be below 75% relative humidity on solid subfloors.

Wood flooring is still top of the list for problems on underfloor heating. We all accept that wood moves with seasonal changes which affect temperature and humidity.

The consequence, are stresses created on the weakest point of the installation which (given the scenario above), could be the strength of the adhesive.

There is always a solution, but due to differences in each installation, it is impossible to list them all.

My best advice is for you to discuss the situation with the product manufacturer. If their reply is install the products according to British Standards then question them as the standards do not cover installing over dry subfloors!

All products should be in equilibrium with each other.

(The dictionary definition of equilibrium: ‘A state in which opposing forces or influences are balanced – The state of being physically balanced – A calm state of mind.’)

Ask yourself, do you have a calm state of mind about your decisions on the installation, or are you wealthy enough to cover the costs of failure? **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.

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David Gatfield on subfloor preparation

Scrubbing machine gets you out of a scrape

OUR technical services department is often asked to arbitrate where there is a conflict of opinions between the flooring contractor and architect, main contractor or end user.

A typical scenario is where the flooring contractor has done his level best to turn out a good job, often working in less than perfect conditions, or where during his efforts he has been trampled asunder by other trades.

Anyway, as usual it's the bloke on his hands and knees who generally gets the worst of it.

When the job is finished (on time and against all the odds) they suddenly put the lighting and heating on, remove the floor protection that was put down in semi-darkness the second the welding was finished, then immediately pull the job to pieces.

That's where we often come in to shed a bit of light, pun intended, and common sense on the situation.

Not that floorlayers are

shrinking violets when it comes to standing their corner, but manufacturers' assurances that all is as well as can be expected under the circumstances carries a great deal of weight and is often all that's needed to get payment released.

The most frequent issues we're asked to comment on are subfloor preparation and the quality of the hot welding. I recently attended meetings on both subjects where complaints were made.

Most welding, if reasonable to begin with, is easily put right – often just needing a bit more trimming with a newly sharpened spatula, or router tool if we're talking about mitres.

The real problems are when a smoothing screed has been applied and the trowel sweeps are clearly visible through the finished flooring. Big problem, and the hardest to defend or put right.

In the 'olden days' when I started out in the trade, all

rubbing down of latex and even acrylic smoothing compound was done by hand, in my case with a 6in carborundum stone.

Oh the joy as an apprentice being allowed to rub down by hand several hundred metres of screed done the week before and set like granite, and the bliss after trapping my frozen fingers for the umpteenth time as the block snagged and rolled on a winter's morning with frost on the ground and sub-zero temperatures – and that was inside the building.

Sadly for the masochists, that's all changed now, or at least should have.

These days, most smoothing compounds have improved flows and many flooring contractors have become mechanised, using old scrubbing machines fitted with sand paper or carborundum discs, so the essential hard work of rubbing down can be done standing up.

It's worth going the extra mile with subfloor preparation, as

once the flooring is down and people demand seasick tablets to walk across the floor there's precious little that can be done, even if flooring manufacturers confirm that 'undulations in the smoothing compound visible through the finished flooring, though unsightly, are unlikely to cause a breakdown in the flooring system'.

Often this does not pacify the client whose expectations may be far higher than what has been achieved.

So, invest in a second-hand scrubbing machine and a spiked roller, use them on every job where smoothing compound is laid, keep all the other trades out whilst you lay the floor and you'll achieve perfect results every time. Okay, I know the 'other trades' bit is fantasy, but at least you could give it a try. **CFJ**

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