

Help and advice



John Roberts on installing wood flooring

Sound and dry, OK? It must also be level

LAST month I wrote about the need for subfloors to be sound and dry. This month I deal with the third aspect, LEVEL.

This is normally interpreted as a subfloor with variations measured under a straight edge, of no greater than 3mm.

The length of the straight edge varies from 3000mm to 1000mm, depending on the British Standard being used or the manufacturing tolerance being applied. This does not mean use a spirit level to ensure the subfloor has no deviation from level.

Some floor coverings obviously benefit from being laid on a spirit level subfloor, for example floating floor coverings, but this does not mean you cannot lay floating floor coverings on subfloors which are not truly spirit level.

Consider the implications of laying these types of floorcoverings on subfloors which are not spirit level, for instance floating wood products which can move in the direction of the slope, resulting in no expansion gap along at least one wall.

They may also show gaps away from the skirting board / scotia at the opposite end. The results

'Some floorcoverings benefit from being laid on a spirit level subfloor, for example floating floors, but this does not mean you cannot lay floating floors on subfloors which are not truly spirit level'

would be unsatisfactory and this is often costly to put right.

I can hear you say the customer will not pay to have the floor levelled or there is too much variation to level. If so, are you giving the customer the right advice? Consider selecting a product that can cope with subfloors that are not spirit level?

Moving on to subfloors that are not flat and smooth (most of the subfloors the installers come across). Just applying a 3mm thick skim, only serves to raise the level of the subfloor.

A skim should be applied at various thicknesses with a minimum of 3mm (or other thicknesses as specified by a manufacturer) to smooth the subfloor to within acceptable tolerances.

If this cannot be achieved due to floor levels in other rooms, discuss the situation with the

client, pointing out that if a floorcovering is installed on a subfloor that does not meet the British Standard or the manufacturer's standard (if they require a tighter tolerance) the guarantee may be void.

It is wise to discuss the situation with the manufacturer who can advise you on their policy for variations to the standards. Remember if you do not advise the manufacturer, how do expect them to help you if there is a problem.

Manufacturers are perceived to be looking for any excuse to get out of a problem! Talking or written documents can help to resolve situations that cannot be installed within normal tolerances.

So why not try to work with the manufacturer instead of waiting for a problem to manifest itself?

It is alright to apply a skim of at

least 3mm in thickness, but these products require the skill of the installer to apply them with minimum trowel ridges! (TAOFS run courses on subfloor preparation).

If ridges are left in a skim, grind down the surface to a smooth finish by using a hand stone for small areas or a sanding / grinding machine for larger areas. I accept that this operation takes time, but the cost of complaints is normally far greater!

There is much more to this subject than can be written in a single article, so remember to ask questions.

Don't take risks! The bottom line is that you are the professional.

You should possess sufficient knowledge to carry out installations to acceptable standards, always read the instructions and, if you need help, don't hesitate to ask! **CFJ**

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Sid Bourne on avoiding disputes

Always get the paper work signed or else!

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floor was soon scratched and indented all over.

Enter the independent inspector. After hearing the facts, he asked for the moisture readings and signed documents. Sheepishly, the contractor said there were none.

And where did the contractor get his information that the durability of American cherry was equivalent to jatoba?

He said he 'thought' they would be the same.

The customer assumed that the flooring contractor was experienced and 'knew his stuff' and therefore took his advice on the cherry floor.

She was asked, regardless of species, did she really expect that

the wood floor would not scratch or dent.

She said she understood that real wood floors scratch; she had a real oak wood floor in a previous property and it scratched, but not too badly. That was why durability was so important. Scratches on the American cherry were unacceptable.

The problems didn't end there; the customer was unhappy with the applied polyurethane finish; also there was dust on all the fixed wall units and the built-in fire surround. Quite rightly, she refused to accept any of this.

Finally, large gaps appeared between the floorboards.

The contractor was advised not to contest this, but to replace the floor or return the money as this would be the cheapest option.

However, believing that he only did what was asked of him, he went to court. Of course, he lost. It was a very expensive lesson.

Remember to make sure with any job to do everything professionally. Take moisture readings of subfloor; document this with the time and date and get it signed off by the customer.

Not least, check the customer's expectations. Do they have pets? Is the wood floor the right species?

Take readings of the wood when it is delivered; take readings before installation, let the flooring settle before sanding (around a week or so) clean up, before, and in between coats, let it cure before moving the furniture back or at least protect the floor.

If the contractor in question had

done all these things and had all the changes and agreements signed off, he would not have lost all the money.

As I have written about in **CFJ**, there are customers who try to take advantage of flooring contractors. That is why it is so important to have signed documentation about every fact relevant to the installation, and especially any changes made.

The message is to get a signature on the paperwork if you want a signature on the cheque with your full payment! **CFJ**

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