

Help and advice



Terry Wolfe on solving problems

Failure: Someone is always to blame!

THERE are two categories of problems and disputes that I regularly attend. The first involves installers who take chances and then are surprised when it all goes pear-shaped.

My question: Did you test the screed for dampness?

Reply: No, I can tell if a subfloor is damp.

Question: Did you check the flatness with a straight-edge?

Reply: No, it looked fine to me (this where there are hollows or bumps of 5 mm in 1 m!);

Question: Did you not notice the screed was crumbling away?

Reply: Yes, but I thought the adhesive would bind it! Investigations of such floors are easy, and take little ingenuity to complete.

Then there are the mysterious problems: The sheet vinyl that lifts; the rubber flooring that bubbles; the wood strip that shrinks.

The contractors carried out hygrometer tests prior to installation; skilled fitters applied the adhesives with text book precision; the maintenance is in accordance with the manufacturers instructions.

Every aspect conforms with the relevant British Standard or the manufacturer's recommendations yet, even so, the floor failed!

So what has gone wrong?

This is where a consultant comes in really handy! For example, bubbles in floors can be extremely vexatious.

It is often difficult to diagnose the cause. Is it dampness, lack of screed adhesion, lack of adhesion under the sheet or defective floorcovering?

If a problem occurs such as in the picture below, there are usually three main possibilities:



1. Defective material: The incidence of defective floorcoverings, adhesives or screeds is extremely rare.

Manufacturers have intensive quality control systems in place, and whilst these can fail, they rarely do. Where a products seems defective, this can usually be verified by testing

by an independent laboratory.

2. Defective specification: A flooring material used in the wrong environment; the wrong adhesive used, or an incompatible screeding compound; primer not applied, or wrong primer applied.

It is worth occasionally re-reading the manufacturer's data sheet (often available on the internet) to ensure the recommended adhesive or screed or primer has not changed, or the method of application or open time varied.

3. Defective installation: Read any leaflets or labels that come with the flooring materials. As mentioned above, these procedures can, and do, change. Manufacturers are continually striving to improve their materials, and these improvements often involve changes in the application technique.

At the end of the day, there is always a cause of failure and it is always someone's fault. Try to ensure it is not yours! **CFJ**

Contact Terry Wolfe on

■ Tel: 01438 364336 (new)

■ Fax: 01438 364845 (new)

■ E: terrywolfe@flooringforensics.net



John Roberts on installing wood flooring

Chipboard OSB subfloors in the frame

WE may all have our views on chipboard OSB subfloors and some have already experienced problems associated with them.

But we have to install floorcoverings over them. So here are a few tips to help you avoid costly problems:

■ Installation of nail and glue down wood: I have come across many problems with both nail and glue down methods mainly due to the poor installation of the chipboard. The chipboard is very often just spot glued along the tongue and groove instead of a full bead of glue along the whole length of the tongue and groove.

WARNING: Spot glueing leaves a weak area of the chipboard and OSB and when wood is installed over the top and starts to move with changes of humidity and temperature, the first thing to give is the chipboard join resulting in gaps between the finished wood flooring.

Most customers end up blaming the installer as they don't normally understand the construction of the subfloor and are only

concerned about the appearance of the finished wood.

This can lead to costly repairs and replacements. There are also problems with nailed down chipboard and OSB when they settle and move due to humidity and temperature.

This types of subfloor tends to move either lifting the nail or opening up the hole around the nail resulting in the subfloor moving and quite often squeaking.

SOLUTION: How can you reduce or eliminate the problem? Eliminate is a brave word, so let us just say reduce the risk to a minimum.

My advice is to overlay with suitable plywood fitting it at right angles to the chipboard and securely fixing (check for pipes!) but if glueing down I recommend glueing the plywood with suitable wood glue with full spread not spot or bead glueing.

It would also be advisable to use a few fixings to hold the plywood in place until the adhesive has set. I accept this would add cost to the job, but how much does it cost

when the subfloor goes wrong? You will now have a more stable subfloor to work on.

■ Once you have stabilised the subfloor how do you install your wood? One method is to fully glue the wood to the plywood; alternatively you could nail and glue to create a more belt and braces installation.

I recommend using tongue screws as these will not break away the chipboard on the underside and tend to hold more securely if the subfloor moves. Of course, glueing in addition to using screw gives a belt and braces installation.

■ When it comes to fitting carpets by the stretch fit method the subfloor can still cause you problems! I have had many a fitter on the phone stating the customer is not happy as the carpet has shrunk!

In most cases the carpet has not shrunk (accepting there has been no leaks!) it has been the subfloor which has shrunk or even, as found in some cases, the studded walls have moved, but

very rarely.

My advice is to inform the customer that if the subfloor does shrink it is not the fault of the carpet installation!

To reduce your risk of being blamed take a pencil and mark a line next to the skirting board around the room informing the customer what you are doing.

This line will help you if there was a problem as you can see if the subfloor has moved or not. If the subfloor has moved or shrunk the line will be away from the skirting board and you will be able to show this to the customer.

If you are glueing down a carpet I always advise overlaying with plywood. **CFJ**

(John Roberts or The Academy of Flooring Skills assumes no responsibility or liability and does not establish responsibility or liabilities for third parties through the application of the principles or techniques contained in this article.)

John Roberts is floorcovering and training consultant and founder of TAOFs.

■ W: www.taofs.co.uk

■ E: john@jroberts.co.uk

■ T: 07831584334