



Alan Jackson & Andy Hone on calcium sulphate screeds

New series

'Tremendous benefits and savings' offered

ANHYDRITE based calcium sulphate flowing screeds are attracting a great deal of interest from contractors, with many switching from traditional sand and cement products. There is a clear trend towards the use of these type of screeds despite the downturn in the housing market.

The reasons behind this trend are fairly simple. The speed of installation, the early strength gain and surface durability, the design flexibility in terms of both material depth and use in conjunction with other materials offer tremendous benefits and savings both to the contractor and to the client.

The screed has very good environmental credentials. Our flooring screed is manufactured from a waste material, which would previously have gone to landfill. It allows designers to use thicker and more environmentally friendly insulations.

Having a high density makes it ideal for acoustic detailing. It has very high thermal conductivity making it ideal for use with underfloor heating systems. The fact that less screed is required to cover greater areas means that less material is used in construction, reducing embodied energy.

Other reasons include the skills shortage in construction. It is increasingly difficult to

obtain good quality traditional screeders and the positive health and safety impacts of using an anhydrite product often mean it is the material of choice for main contractors and developers.

Employing just 10 people in the UK, Lafarge Gyvlon is a small but highly successful subsidiary of the worldwide Lafarge Group. We manufacture Gyvlon anhydrite floor screed binder and supply it to Lafarge Readymix, Tarmac and other independent readymix suppliers. It is utilised in the manufacture of Gyvlon flowing floor screeds.

In addition to supplying the binder, we also offers technical advice and specification services. Those who have sought this advice include architects, main contractors, sub-contractors, screeders and finished floorlayers.

Currently operating from in Warrington in Cheshire, we have manufactured in the UK for over 15 years and are the UK's largest producer of anhydrite binders, supplying enough Gyvlon for screed production to cover millions of square meters.

In 2007 alone we produced enough to screed over 2m sq m. We are also able to draw on the further expertise and experience from our colleagues in France, Germany and

Holland where the group has been supplying anhydrite binders for much longer. Anhydrite screed binders have been used in Europe to a much greater extent than in the UK and much of the material is laid by the same contractors who install subsequent floorcoverings with very few problems.

That is not to say there have not been issues but we have found that the vast majority of problems associated with anhydrite screeds in the UK could easily have been avoided if those using the material had sought out information from the right experts at the design stage and prior to installation.

This information is freely available from our technical teams who can offer a good deal of practical advice, and also via our web site which covers technical, specification, installation and post installation advice along with a wealth of other information about the material and how it should be used. **CFJ**

■ Next month we answer specific questions from flooring contractors.

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Martin Cummins on whether the trade is paying attention

When floorlayers don't bother to listen!

RECENT telephone discussions and site visits have left me somewhat perplexed as to what the real role of technical is.

A fair proportion of my working time is spent looking at products, innovations and new systems – all ways to improve jobs and to ensure that installations are easier and perhaps most importantly successful.

It may include looking at 'greener' options, looking at products that offer safer handling or simply ways of achieving faster installation. Trouble is it seems to me that these 'new' systems are not what the industry wants, unless of course they are cheap and cheerful.

Obviously in times of recession this is understandable, but in reality it is also unforgivable. Hopefully this will change as and when we move out of the present economic climate.

So what do I do in my capacity as 'Technical' here at Laybond? I'm often asked to go to site and test or assess the subfloor for suitability to lay flooring products. The site visits incur no cost to

either the main contractor or the flooring contractor, it is a service which we don't charge for (maybe we should?).

All too often however, if the result I give isn't the one that's wanted the main contractor or indeed the flooring contractor will go elsewhere in search of results that suit them. Now we go to these sites with the best of intentions, not to get you to buy more products that you don't need.

Often my advice given is nothing more than, for example, ensuring the underfloor heating is properly commissioned etc, with no need for you to spend more.

I thought this month I'd look at some of the classic free bits of advice we often give out, and which can make a huge difference to the success of a job, yet are all too often met with indifference.

■ **Hygrometers and moisture testing:** As a technical department we have a commitment to ensure that what we recommend is fit for purpose and that we are recommending in accordance with all the standards

laid down. This brings me to hygrometers as we've had a number of problems recently, and also healthy heated discussions, regarding their use.

The most common issue is us being told they hygrometer tests are a waste of time and that they want to use another test. When challenged I am met with 'well hygrometers always give a higher reading.' Higher maybe, but it's probably the correct reading.

The solution from the main contractor is often to get an 'independent' in. This may involve using specialist firms whose business it is to test buildings for dampness (do they really know as much about floors as ourselves, do they have the interest of the flooring contractor in mind and do they test in accordance with the known Standards...answers on a postcard please!!).

I have been privy to dampness reports from such firms where they have arrived on site, departed four hours later and assured the contractor his floor was dry...less than 75%RH.

When contractors ask for a

specification and tell me they've had a moisture test done but shy away from the specifics of the testing method, we would be reluctant to put in writing a specification for products based on their readings – hence our offer of technical support.

Perhaps the day will come when we will be able to justify another method, but at present the British Standards state the use of a hygrometer as it is tried and tested and understood and for this reason alone should be the only reading accepted. I, for one, would welcome alternative methods provided they are precise, accurate and relevant to flooring.

■ **Underfloor heating:** There's been lots of discussion and debate within committees based on site problems, site requirements etc, and the stance has to be that the laying of floorcovering on systems incorporating underfloor heating should not be carried out until the UFH system has been fully

Continued on page 36



Sid Bourne on a crackling wood floor

'Miracle' underlay? You've got to be joking!

I WAS called out to investigate the cause of a squeaking and crackling noise coming from a floating engineered flooring which had been installed four or five months earlier.

The customer said everything was fine for the first few months, but the noise was getting worse. I asked if the home was inhabited when the flooring was installed. In fact, the customer had been living in the house for several years; previously there had been a carpet.

The subfloor was a concrete base on ground level and the installation was around 175sq m in total with breaks in doorways. It looked fine from a visual point of view, however there was a bad crackling noise when it was walked on.

One possibility was that the edges were rubbing against each other, but if this was the case it would have squeaked straight after the installation five months earlier. After walking over the flooring several times I noticed deflection in several places, giving me the impression that the subfloor was at fault.

I asked the retailer what subfloor prep had been done and what the moisture readings showed. Nothing had been done, he told me. Underlay was used to help level subfloors ready to receive floating floors; the underlay used apparently had a DPM to stop moisture.

I thought I have to see this. It must be a 'miracle' underlay to make subfloor preparation materials obsolete.

The retailer and customer agreed that we could uplift the flooring to find out the real cause of the problem. First, we arranged for the skirting to be taken off. Luckily it was screwed on so that was easy. But then **Oops** – we found the first problem – no expansion. The flooring was extremely tight against three walls.

The floor came up easily thanks to a good locking system. I then took moisture readings of the wood and got various readings from 9%

to 19% – **Oops**.

'It's a bit wet, ain't it, mate!' I confronted the fitter who had arrived on the scene. His face went bright red when he realised what I was saying, but he accepted that the fault was his.

And then a third **Oops** as I discovered the real nature of the material I was led to believe was a self levelling, epoxy filled underlay.

It turned out to be a cheap and nasty 3mm underlay with cling film attached to it. But to be fair to the fitter the label did say levelling underlay. So he presumed it was suitable for absolutely everything, wind surfing included.

Then yet another **Oops** as we discovered that joints had not been taped.

We then moved on to the subfloor and, you guessed it, one more **Oops**.

There were deep cuts in the concrete in an area of the room where high moisture readings had been taken. I questioned the customer about this. She knew about them but thought nothing of it, especially as the carpet had been down for a couple of years with no problem.

I explained to the customer what had been happening – the carpet was allowing moisture vapours through it. This may have made it a bit smelly. Yes, the customer agreed. It had become very smelly and this was the reason for getting a wood floor installed.

But since the wood installation hydrostatic pressure had built up under the 'miracle' underlay and found its way through mainly via the joints. (The lesson here is always to tape the joints using correct tape.)

The wood flooring in this case had taken on board the moisture, becoming saturated. This had given rise to excessive compression which was causing the crackling noise.

I explained to the customer that this fault in the concrete was the reason why most of the moisture came through the large cuts in the

subfloor. To cure it we would require not 'miracle' underlay, but good tried and tested subfloor preparation.

Normally the flooring would have to be completely replaced. But for whatever reason the wood in this case had not cupped or crowned in any way. Realising that she would not have to pay for replacing the floor, the customer suddenly became very amicable. She was positively friendly. The retailer and fitter also co-operated.

We agreed to air dry the flooring and see how it came out. The results were excellent. I then advised the fitter on how to rectify the subfloor which the consumer agreed to pay for and the retailer agreed to do at cost. So everyone was happy.

The flooring has since been put back in place with suitable subfloor preparation, not the 'miracle' underlay, but back to basics and using self smoothing underlayment and a good quality underlay with all joints taped.

Hey presto it looks great. The customer actually phoned to thank me and to say how pleased she is with the installation.

The retailer has been back into her home and done more work so he is happy. By the way, this complaint goes back over 18 months ago and to date there have no further problems.

The fitter on this job has become like a long lost cousin; he phones me for advice on a regular basis; in fact it was he who suggested that I write about this case when we met up for a pint the other week.

The moral of the story don't believe what you might hear or read about 'miracle' underlays: They really, really, really, do not exist! **CFJ**

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When floorlayers just don't bother to listen!

Continued from page 34

commissioned.

There are numerous reasons for this; the commissioning process will identify any weakness in the screed and show up any potential for cracking as well as showing up any leaks and will also contribute to a degree to drying out the floor (particularly where plasterers have been working!!).

However there is a reluctance to do this and often it may not even be practical if the floor company needs to do works on the site before the system is ready to be run (still requires purging, may not be any mains connections etc.) or, I suspect more often the case, there is a cost to running the systems.

But at the end of the day,

Martin Cummins

regardless of any logistical issues, if any problems show themselves then you have a major problem on your hands and I know this to have happened on a number of jobs.

■ **Joints in floors:** We often make recommendations and offer methods of treatment to avoid problems and these include correct appreciation and treatments of expansion joints, day joints and saw-cut joints.

We do it for a reason, we don't want the floor looking like a patchwork quilt any more than the architect or the contractor with lines everywhere, but we want to actually guarantee the floor is sound and the covering will stay in place.

We want to avoid future problems equally as much as we want to provide a floor that looks good at day one.

■ **Priming:** Yes that old chestnut and before you roll your eyes, it is worth saying that if think companies make a massive amount of money through recommending priming then you are sadly mistaken. Primers go such a long way per-square-metre that we make pennies! So why do we recommend it?

There are various technical reasons why different primers are recommended for different scenarios but, at the end of the day, we do so because it will make sure the job will work and will increase by a huge margin the likelihood of that installation

being a success.

So.. please, please, please when you call us to site and we offer a recommendation based on the hygrometer readings, recommending switching underfloor heating off, and to prime the subfloor don't come back to us saying you can't be bothered.

Listen to us and take note because we only make recommendations with one goal in mind and that is to ensure the success of an installation. Invite us in by all means but do us the service of listening! **CFJ**

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