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IF YOU SPECIFY IT, KNOW HOW IT SHOULD BE INSTALLED and IF YOU BID IT, KNOW HOW TO INSTALL IT

Now that's a mouthful of title but it's a subject that's just as filling. There are several issues that cause installation of flooring materials to be compromised and it's not always, as many may think, the installers fault. In this case the sword has two edges that both cut deep. We'll start with the specification of the commercial flooring product that is to be installed. The specifier may not know all they should know about the flooring product being specified. This is understandable because the specifier is believed to be knowledgeable about every material placed into the spec in a particular project so they may be more familiar with one type of building material than another. And with all the changes in flooring materials over the last several years it would be impossible for anyone to know all about them. Sometimes the sales agent, manufacturer, or supplier of the material doesn't know all about the product because they may not be producing the product they represent or they just don't fully understand the characteristics or capabilities of the product.

But, having said that, the first thing the specifier has to be aware of is the qualification of the product for the space. Is it possible to install the selected flooring product into a specific space and will it perform as expected? And what made you choose that product and install it in that space? These are questions often not researched thoroughly during the selection process. I can't tell you the number of times we've been involved in a commercial flooring dispute over the wrong product in the wrong place. Another issue is how the spec is written for the installation of the product contrary to the manufacturer's installation guidelines and specification. This information is readily available in black and white on the manufacturer's website; unfortunately, sometimes it's not followed. If we can find the installation guidelines then so can whoever is writing the specs or installing the material. Sometimes specs written may contain old, outdated information.



As for specification of the flooring product and installation, you have to know what works where, why and why not and if it's even feasible to use the flooring material where it's being considered to be installed. Not every flooring material works in every space and sometimes, in order to use the material, very definite guidelines must be met. For example, wood flooring may look great in a particular space but if there are high levels of moisture in the concrete, high humidity in the space or, conversely, very dry air or lots of high heels; it may not perform satisfactorily and, in fact, fail miserably. If you specify such a product without knowing how it will react to environmental conditions and it fails the result is the wrong product in the wrong place because someone specified what they liked or what was wanted but didn't bother to determine whether the product would actually be appropriate for the application. And just because the information said it would work doesn't mean it actually will. You have to use some common sense in these situations and not always believe everything being marketed. Expanding that thought, the influx of imported hard surface flooring products is challenging the marketplace. Many of these products have no history of performance, no tech services backing and no compliance to the domestic market. They may look good and be less expensive but the potential for failure is much greater and if there is a failure good luck getting help. The blame will normally fall on the installation or the condition of the space which means this hot potato is looking to nest in your hands.



We can look at another aspect and that might be the color of the product and particularly carpet. A light color in a space that gets moderate to heavy traffic that will generate soiling is not a wise decision; a problem more common than dirt itself; or a products construction that will not deliver service or appearance retention simply because, by design, it is incapable of doing so.



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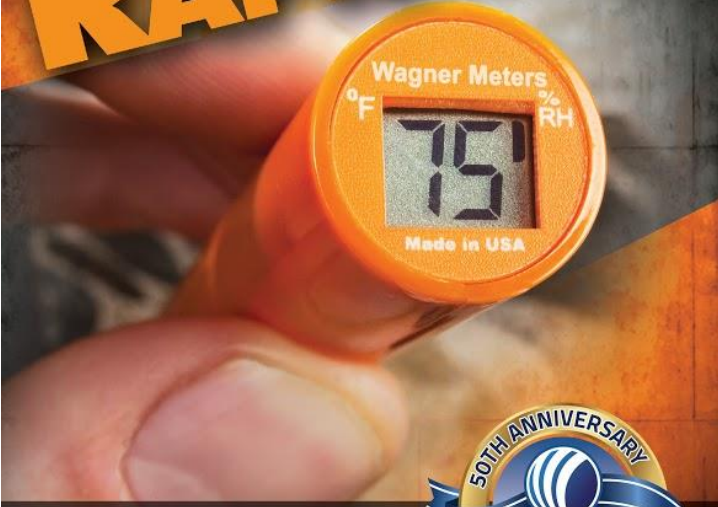
However, the selection of the product was written into the specification and no one bidding the project is going to question the product specified. They just bid the job complying with the spec without saying a word about whether or not the product is going to be the best for that space and they may not know or care either. Unfortunately asking the rep may not necessarily give you the right answer either. At this point in this article you may be feeling a bit queasy about using any flooring material but rest assured, there is ALWAYS the right product for the space if you know what to use and if you take the time to find out a bit more about that product. Whether you're a large firm or a small one that specifies flooring material, there are answers at your fingertips about what you want to use and if it will actually work. You can Google for answers, search the manufacturers websites, ask the flooring contractor on the project, who actually may know more than anyone else if they focus strictly on commercial work or ask them to find the right product for you or you can ask LGM. But if you don't know anything about the product other than it's a commercial carpet, wood, tile or whatever, it's not going to help you if a problem occurs later.

Another point of writing the spec is making sure whoever bids the job has the qualifications and experience to install the material. We won't get into the details of that here because I've already written an issue on qualifying the flooring contractor and installers. So, needless to say, the firm installing the material has to know what they're doing and what type of flooring they're being asked to install which leads us to the second part of this issue and that's if you bid it, know how to install it and we'll add to that the very important comment, know what the product is that's being specified which goes back to the specifier and the spec itself.

So let's say you have a project that calls for a complex patterned carpet to be installed in open areas and the winner of the bid gets the job and sees the carpet for the first time when it's unrolled upon receipt and just before installation. Surprise! It has a complex pattern and the freaking out starts. We didn't put enough in the bid to work with this product or the bid winner doesn't know what a power stretcher, deadman or crab stretcher is and you're doomed before you start. The call goes out

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that the material is impossible to install and therefore it's a manufacturing issue. Not so fast there Sherlock! Ignorance on your part doesn't constitute an emergency on my part. Or just because you thought you could do this at the low price you bid and really can't doesn't make it someone else's problem. So to help avoid these catastrophes the first step is to state fully and specifically what the product is that's to be installed; whether it's patterned goods or requires special layouts or some particular and unique characteristic of the material be understood. All the nuances of the product specified must be taken into consideration when bidding the job. With the new patterns, designs, shapes, installation technology, backings or unique characteristics both soft and hard surface flooring has today, knowing about all of them is a challenge.

What's Next?

For the Flooring Contractor: If you bid the job, know how to install it and fully understand what it's going to take to do the job so it complies with all the guidelines, industry standards and manufacturers guidelines. Surprises are only fun in Cracker Jacks boxes, not on floor covering projects. How can you bid a job when you don't know what is going to be required to install it? A truly professional flooring contractor is going to take the time and effort to know what the product is that is going to be installed. Ask questions about the product so they understand it, respond to ambiguities in the spec and have the trained crews on hand to get the flooring properly installed regardless of what type product it is. These type flooring contractors may cost a bit more but they actually save money in the long run because they really do know what they're doing. Some firms across the country are so good at what they do that the flooring manufacturers may actually say, "Whatever so and so firm says is our installation policy" because these guys never met a flooring material they couldn't install. These firms do exist in the form of Starnet, Fuse and others. On the other hand the likelihood of having a problem with the low bidder is pretty high. The phrase, "you get what you pay for" should ring in your ears here. These are the installation guys that lack the experience of working a commercial flooring installation, never saw this type product, didn't put enough in the bid to do what has to be done, had no clue about the product or unique installation techniques and then complain when they find out they're way over their head and say, "this is not what I expected." And you expected what; something easy because



you put a cheap number on it? How does that work? The inability of the inexperienced flooring installer does not constitute an installation issue that everyone else has to be responsible for. This problem belongs to the folks who hired these guys; no one else.

Having looked at flooring issues for the last 44 years and understanding what is required to prep the job and install the material has given us some insight as to the cause of problems in the field. How many times we've looked at a project only to ask, "so what were you thinking when you did this or let this happen?" As my father used to say when I was a kid, "do you think some little genie is going to appear at night and fix this?" Never happened for me and it's not going to happen on a messed up flooring installation.

So Now What?

That answer is easy, when specifying a flooring material make sure you know the product and understand how the manufacturer says it has to be installed and write that into the spec. Also, understand that if you want the flooring material properly installed you have to have the right firm doing the work. Does that sometimes cost more? Yes it does but here you should be thinking "do it right the first time." Allowing for mistakes to be made, complaining and then having to pay 10 times what it would have cost initially to do it right does not make good economic sense. As for the flooring contractor or installers bidding the job; know what the flooring material is you have to install, find out what it takes to install the material according to the manufacturer's installation guidelines including the prep and bid the job accordingly, understanding what it takes to do it correctly. Research the installation and see if it requires something special being done. If you don't know what you're doing don't bid the job or get ready to get creamed when you start having problems. The end user or client must also know that to get a flooring product and installation correct they've got to accept what it takes to fulfill their objectives. As I've said for decades, "the flooring never lies; it will always tell you what's wrong if you know how to interpret what its saying." Just like the evidence at a crime scene; it tells the story that solves the case and puts the perpetrator of the problem or failure in the spotlight. Fortunately, flooring issues are not life threatening but they can be business threatening. If you need help with writing a spec, getting the right flooring installed, finding a qualified flooring contractor or just need a question asked, contact us; we have the answers.

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