

Tread with caution

For fit-out contractors thinking of providing flooring as well as ceilings or partitioning, for example, FIS technical manager **Joe Cilia** warns of the need to tread with caution. Although flooring might look like a simple add-on sale, for those not experienced in the specific specification and installation requirements, it might end up costing more than is expected.



Unlike ceilings and, to a certain extent, partitioning, flooring comes into contact with lots of people every day as they enter and use buildings. And this means that any issues with the product or installation can become apparent quite quickly.

As with any product, success comes with the right product being specified for the right situation from the outset – flooring is no different. With such a wide range of flooring to choose from, the first step can be difficult. So, consider the options. These can be grouped into hard flooring, soft flooring, and even specialist resilient flooring and entrance matting. Then there is

material choice, with ceramic and stone, laminate and wood, rubber and sheet products, and roll and tile all available. Each will have its merits, including its impact on performance (sound) and wearability as well as its impact on the environment.

All of this needs to be considered alongside the issue of where it is going to be used.

Karen Lambert, marketing director UK/Ireland at Interface, said: “It’s about specifying the right product/colour for the area/function. For example, from a design perspective, sometimes a light colour might look the best initially

but won’t be the best in the long-run due to the risk of staining.”

Secondly, you should consider the substrate that it is going to be laid on. Is it sound and level? Is it dust-free and dry? These may sound like obvious questions, but there are instances where an installation has taken place too early and the flooring has started to delaminate, leading to costly remediation.

Lisa Tomlin, managing director at distributor Carpet & Flooring, advised: “Preparation is key when it comes to fitting flooring. It’s important to ensure the floor is level and has dried properly. Measure the humidity level of the

floor because if it’s too damp, the covering will eventually blister and rise. Good manufacturers can help you with this measurement.

“Using the right type of adhesive for the environment is also crucial. It’s not just about sticking the covering to the floor – you must also consider the ambient temperature of the room where it’s being fitted and the expected foot traffic to make sure the floor will last.

“Consider the floor covering itself too. The backing, or the construction of hardwood or safety flooring, will determine whether plywood is needed or not, or which underlay to use, if any.”

Another consideration is the planned maintenance programme: a cheap floor with a costly maintenance programme or short life can cost a lot more in the long-run. Ms Lambert added: “Having a good maintenance programme in place is sometimes overlooked yet it has a big impact on the continued appearance of the floor.”

Understanding the proposed flooring’s impact on the environment is another very important aspect in the selection process. This can be measured in several ways: its recycled content; its environmental impact, which is often measured using an Environmental Product Declaration (EPD); and its ability to be recycled.

Andrew Jackson, director of marketing (EMEA) for Shaw Contract, said: “The true Holy Grail here is to learn lessons from the insights gained from life cycle assessments and EPDs and look for a holistic solution to environmental problems.”

He added: “Tiles should be designed for recycling and systems put in place for collection and return to the manufacturer for the raw material to be recovered and turned into new carpets. Effectively, the Cradle to Cradle approach or circular economy model.”

So, do tread lightly when considering a new opportunity such as this, and take advice before stepping into a new area. FIS members that manufacture and distribute flooring can be found at www.thefis.org/member-directory

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