



THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN A FLOORING SPECIFICATION (Part I)

We've looked at hundreds of flooring specifications over the years and have found that the information contained in them is very often outdated, poorly researched, and irrelevant to many of the concerns that should be addressed. Not enough thought is given to the downside risks of the project or to the guidelines and pertinent information that should be contained. With the changes that have occurred in the flooring industry over the last few years, which continue at an increasing rate, it is imperative the spec writer be informed and up to date. Flooring materials have changed and continue to do so, new backings are introduced almost daily it seems, new yarn systems are being fed into the market place, new installation systems almost rival the number of products on the market, substrate issues and mitigation systems for moisture and alkalinity are coming out of the wood work and the majority of them have limitations that are not heeded. Flooring products are being used that are not made in the US so they must be tested in the US to insure they actually are produced to the manufacturer's specifications and as represented. Installation firms bidding on jobs don't always have the skills to work with the products

specified, have not been exposed themselves to new technologies and worse yet bid jobs without knowing what flooring products are to be used or what the site and substrate conditions are. Myriads of issues that populate each project with unique challenges are not taken into consideration. What should be a clearly defined progression of information is often misconstrued, misunderstood and contested. Worst of all, mid-stream in a project or not long after its completion or, in some cases, just before the flooring is to be installed, a problem presents itself that no one seems to have the answers to. And, worse yet, everyone is an expert and knows what to do when in reality no one does, which only exacerbates an already bad situation. For these reasons a very specific specification needs to be written and provided. There is no reason the spec cannot be definitive and precise. To be less than that only allows for interpretation and compromises that can jeopardize the finished product and project. Arguments should not be started with the words, "what does the spec say?"



The following example is how we write a flooring spec and depending on the project, the spec would fit the demands of that project; it would be unique to it. We take into consideration all that is required; the jobsite conditions, the work and project conditions, staging and logistics, picking the appropriate product and testing it before it's installed, compared to other flooring offerings and just after manufacture but before installation, to insure it is what it is supposed to be. And because we know the industry so well, we build in safeguards that prevent the client from getting bad flooring from otherwise very good, reputable and conscientious manufacturers which also serves to keep the manufacturer out of trouble. A properly written flooring specification should prevent trouble for everyone.

Consider first the products being specified for use on a project:

Relative to the product specified for the project and application; it is the responsibility of the specifier to determine the suitability of the flooring material for the intended use. Don't just take someone's word for it. Research the products yourself, objectively. This may mean having the flooring products being considered for use independently tested prior to being specified and having the test results evaluated by an informed, objective third party. Regardless of what the product is represented to be able to do or its capability of performance, it should still be determined whether or not it will actually live up to the expectations of the client. It's better to find out if changes need to be made at this stage of the project than after the flooring is installed and being used.



Remember too, that you can tell the manufacturer what you want the flooring product to do (this is called a performance spec) but not how you want them to do it (this is called a construction spec). There is always a product available that will perform exactly how you expect it to, even if you have to find another manufacturer. Include in this aspect of the spec the ancillary products as well such as adhesives, floor prep materials, cushion and substrate treatments and mitigating processes.



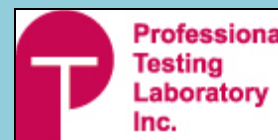
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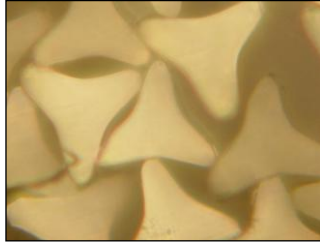


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Let me go back and describe the two specs stated in the parenthesis above. A **performance spec** tells a manufacturer the type of product you want and how and where it is going to be used. This way they can represent the appropriate product best suited for the application. These products can be selected from the manufacturers running line. You can make minor changes to them to “customize” them for the specific application such as dialing up or down the pile height, altering the stitch rate a bit, or altering the color shades – taking the bright yellow for example and making it more of a brown shade. If you tell

them how to build or make it, this is a **construction spec** which means that you want the product made exactly to a specific construction. For example you can say you want a



product that is tufted on a 10th gauge machine (10 needles per inch across the width), 12 stitches per inch, a density of 6800, with a trilobal fiber and a tuft bind or 20 pounds.



Unless you really know what you’re doing and have money to burn, this is not a good idea because you have just custom designed the construction of the product for no good reason. There are plenty of carpets on the market, by all of the commercial carpet manufacturers that would be considered running line that can give you the same performance by just selecting the correct one. Rarely does anyone specify a true construction spec and really, there’s no need to. Whether the product is carpet, vinyl, tile, wood, rubber, etc., there’s always a product in the line that will work for the intended use.

Next would be the following two items:

DESCRIPTION OF WORK PROJECT SITE:

Installation of new carpet tile and broadloom carpet, hard surface flooring materials, concrete staining/coloring and cove base over new concrete substrate; cleaning and preparation of surface to receive new flooring materials according to manufacturer’s and industry standards.

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Comment: This is just what it says it is, simple as it may seem. It clearly and concisely states what type of flooring work and what types of products and finishes are to be installed. This will be elaborated on further into the spec.

RELATED WORK:

Drawings and general provisions of the contract including general, special and supplementary conditions.

Comment: This statement simply says the contract and drawings will provide additional and specific information and lets it be known in this section of the spec.

QUALITY ASSURANCE:

Manufacturer assures the product submitted is appropriate for the application and environment in which it is to be installed and that the product is merchantable for service, free of visible and latent defects and will perform for the purpose for which it is intended without compromise. No product will be accepted that is produced on weekends or third shift. Production times, dates and runs to be supplied for assurance and compliance to this demand. All flooring products are to be tested independently prior to shipment for compliance to specifications. Architect, owner and consultant have the right of refusal for non-compliance. A client representative may choose to personally inspect the product at the point of manufacture or prior to the product being shipped. (This is something we do all the time for our clients)

Comment: Now the Quality Assurance paragraph above is, I'm sure, something you've never seen before. This is written because we know that occasionally someone says that maybe you shouldn't have used this product in this environment, locale, geographic area, on this substrate, etc. This can also be interpreted as maybe you shouldn't be selling this particular product into these mentioned places if you hint that there may be a problem later on. This goes to fitness for intended use and merchantability for service. It is a problem no one wants to have, believe me, unless you want to get to know your attorneys better than you do.

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Why the “no weekends or third shift statement?”

This is from experience of having requested this in a spec, only to have 2,300 yards of carpet made with a blatantly obvious streak three feet in from one side that was made on a Sunday. The carpet had to be relegated to seconds, could only be sold at a distressed price, wasted the manufacturer’s money and put them under severe pressure to remake the same product in short order to meet the project deadline or be subjected to further damages. Now you may not want to put the time of production in your spec but you can use language, such as the last two sentences which will tighten up the quality control aspect of the spec.

MANUFACTURERS QUALIFICATIONS:

Floor covering manufacturer must have at least 10 years of experience in the production of the type of flooring material specified (carpet tile, broadloom carpet and any and all hard surface flooring material and cove base), be financially sound, have technical support for their products and the installation of them and be capable of producing and delivering the product on time and without defects of any kind. Flooring product manufacturer will have a technical installation representative available and on the job site at the inception of the installation to insure there are no conditions which will compromise the installation of the material and that the material is being installed according to industry standards, practices and manufacturers guidelines. The manufacturer’s technical representative (not a sales representative) will document and confirm that the substrate, material and installation are in compliance with manufacturer’s guidelines and accepted industry standards and practices.

Comment: The previous paragraph is again, something that most never see in a specification and there is no reason it can’t be included. Many manufacturers don’t have technical people but they have access to them and good ones at that. So you want to make sure you cover the manufacturer’s qualifications so that you can avoid product and installation problems. Even when there are technical people on site there have been situations where there have been problems. This may prompt the involvement of a third party expert being written into this part of the spec.

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PRODUCT WARRANTY:

Product should be warranted and guaranteed against any and all manufacturing defects, visible or latent, structural or otherwise. Product must be merchantable for service and fit for intended purpose and use. Any and all defects that become visible or are latent which manifest themselves within (x) years of installation (this could be one to five) shall be corrected or replaced at the manufacturer's expense. Manufacturer, installation systems, and consultant shall have installation field technical personnel on site at the commencement of the installation to insure product is being installed according to manufacturer's guidelines, installation system guidelines and industry standards and recommendations and a summary written as to observations, conversations, instructions, conditions, concerns, corrections and other pertinent information. Any noticed defect with the product or installation system will require the response of manufacturer's technical field service personnel on site to determine cause, correction or facilitate replacement.

Comment: You'll notice a theme in this spec. It is very detailed, specific and addresses any conceivable and potentially project threatening circumstance. The information also protects all parties to the project, not just the end user or client. This is a team approach where the manufacturer, flooring contractor/installation firm, installers and client's, as well as GC and architects best interests are recognized and addressed. By wording the spec as has been done there should be no problems and the project should proceed on schedule, on budget and when completed be done. Here we say "get it in the door and keep it on the floor." If everyone agrees to work as a team the goal is the same and insurrection is prevented.

PRODUCT SUBMITTAL:

Finished product from actual run must be submitted for independent testing prior to shipping to installation site to determine compliance with the manufacturer's specification and the specifications of this document. Noncompliance with any aspect of the product specifications will result in rejection of the material.

Samples of the product shall be submitted with enough material supplied for a site installation mock up for a 12x12 space.

Comment: To comply with the theme of the flooring spec the above paragraph provides a built in safety factor for both the client and the manufacturer. Before the product is to be installed but after it is manufactured, it is to be tested to insure it is what is said to be and what the spec calls for and that it actually performs up to expectations. This will avoid any claims for product failure to perform or defects, visible or latent.

In the next issue we will continue with "What to include in a flooring specification." In the meantime if you need help with any flooring problem, concern or issue or help with a spec, let us know so you can make use of our services. One thing you should know is that we can always determine what the problem is, why it exists, who or what is at fault and what can or has to be done to correct it or resolve the issue. Over the last 41 years we've helped thousands of clients, we can help you too.

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