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CHOOSING THE RIGHT FLOORING SYSTEM AND THE RIGHT INSTALLER FOR MY FIREHOUSE FLOORS

Choosing the right system and the right contractor to install it can be difficult at best. Hopefully the following technical information and guidelines will help to insure that you get the best job with the best system at the best price.

First and foremost you MUST understand that installing a resinous coating or topping over an old, eroded or EVEN a NEW concrete floor REQUIRES the expertise of a bona fide experienced resinous flooring contractor. It's NOT a job for a painting contractor, a janitorial or cleaning contractor or your own maintenance staff. If you are going to spend thousands of dollars (and believe me you will) you owe it to yourself or your township/city to choose the right system and the right installer. The WRONG choice of materials or the right choice of materials installed over an inadequately or improperly prepared surface WILL fail. And, when it fails, the cost to remove the failed floor and re-install the correct floor properly could easily approach twice the cost of doing it right in the first place.

Choosing a Contractor

A. Always insist on references when considering a contractor. It's the only proof that your contractor is what he says he is.

B. Choose a contractor that has been in the flooring business for a number of years. ANYONE can do one or two jobs and claim to be an expert. Multiple jobs over multiple years can't be fudged.

C. What type of preparation does the contractor do? Wet preparation? Acid etching, pressure washing or detergent washing? Or, does he use "shot blasting"? ANYONE who's been in the resinous flooring business for ANY length of time will ALWAYS opt to "shot blast" a floor as opposed to wet preparation. ANYONE choosing/recommending wet preparation is indicative of in-experience and should be avoided. The only instance when wet preparation would be acceptable is when a floor that had been previously coated (properly) is going to be recoated. Otherwise, wet preparing a floor and applying a coating is tantamount to washing a car and then painting it. Shot blasting the floor creates a sand paper profile much like sanding a car creates a profiled surface that will hold the paint. Common sense dictates that a coating will bond much more tenaciously to a profiled or sandpaper finish than it will to a smooth finish.

D. ALWAYS compare apples to apples when choosing a contractor. An installer that is offering you a 30 (DRY) mils system is giving you three (3) times as much floor as one who is offering a 10 mils system. If your contractor doesn't state how thick (how many mils) he is giving you, don't even consider his price. Spending $20,000.00 for a floor not knowing how thick it is, is tantamount to spending $20,000.00 for a car not knowing the year, make and model. When buying a floor you are, in fact, buying thickness (mils).

Choosing the Right System

This topic starts off where the last topic ended!

A. When buying a resinous floor you are buying mils (thickness). You are NOT buying numbers of coats. And, you are NOT buying wet mils. You are buying DFT (dry film thickness).

B. Thicker is better! In terms of wear, a 20 mils floor will last twice a long as a 10 mils floors. However, it shouldn't cost twice as much. Many of the costs of doing a floor are the same regardless of the thickness. Preparation costs such as shot blasting, travel expenses, application labor costs, etc are OFTEN the same for a 20 mils floor as they are for a 30 mils floor. Therefore, you can often get 50% more floor or even 100% more floor for perhaps 20% to 25% more cost. Think of it as protecting your investment. As cliché as it sounds, you get what you pay for!

C. Understand the differences between a non-skid finish and a textured finish. Virtually ALL straight "COATING" systems regardless of their thickness have a non-skid/grit added to the finish coat. This grit can be aluminum oxide, quartz, glass beads, crushed walnut shells, or a combination of the above. It is almost always added to the last coat of material. This last coat (what we call the sacrificial coat) is usually a solvent based thin film urethane material that cures to 3 or 4 dry mils. (4 mils is equal to the thickness of 2 sheets of paper) The only thing containing the non-skid is this thin film finish coat. Within a short while (usually a couple of years at best) ALL of the non-skid is gone. The only way to get non-skid back into the floor is to recoat it. Typically this non-skid is broadcast onto the floor at a rate of one lb. per 1,000 square feet. Therefore, a 10,000 square foot service area would use 10 lbs of non-skid or grit.

A textured floor is a whole different animal. The texture is achieved by seeding (broadcasting) a blend of aggregates to excess into a heavy (thick) squeegee applied self leveling 100% solids epoxy. These are called broadcast floors and are typically installed at 1/16" thick (65 mils) or 1/8" (125 mils). They utilize from ½ to 1 lb of aggregate per square foot per broadcast. Therefore, the same floor that used 10 lbs of non-skid would use 6,700 or 13,400 lbs of aggregate. It has been our experience that these uniformly textured broadcast floors hold up 4 or 5 times as well as ANY coating system in an automotive service environment. The aggregate in these broadcast floors adds flexibility and strength to the epoxy much like the stone (aggregate) adds flexibility and strength to concrete.

ANY coating system including these high build 65 mils (1/16") broadcast floors are ONLY as good as the surface on which they are installed. They are still coatings and as such (even though they may be thick) will NOT hide spalled or heavily gouged concrete. If a floor is heavily eroded or more than 15% to 20% of the total area requires major "patching" before a coating system can be installed, then perhaps a power troweled epoxy mortar system at 250 mils (1/4" inch) is the answer.

In ANY event we hope that it's obvious by now that you SHOULD be talking to us about your flooring needs. We've been doing these floors for more than 30 years. We do six (6) contracts per week (300 annually) of which 100 to 125 are Firehouse Apparatus Bays, Auto or Truck service related. We expect this number to grow exponentially since 2005 was our first year to advertise at the NADA and Firehouse Expo shows. We install materials for twelve (12) formulators as well as manufacturing our own materials for our own use.

Sincerely,

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P.S. Some of the national formulators/manufacturers for whom we install resinous flooring systems include:

Econo Surf	Tnemec	Polymerica	Rust-Oleum
Sherwin Williams	Valspar Flooring	National Polymers	Koester
Tennant	Milamar (Polymax)	Rock-Tred	Euclid Chemicals