

floor coveringnews

Underlayments: Every Floor Needs One Stressing The Importance Of What Goes Underneath

Article Number: 608 - (Click here to read the actual article)

Hicksville, N.Y.—Whether it's cushion for carpet or underlayment for laminate, every floor needs the right product underneath it to be 100% effective regarding its performance and durability. As many in the industry believe, without the right underlayment, the flooring sale is only half complete. Several flooring executives recently told FCNews why more emphasis and focus is needed when it comes to what goes under the flooring. "They are extremely important," said Ray Rodriguez, president of Starline Associates, a company that specializes in laminate and cork underlayment.

"They can create the success or failure of the floor. "First," he explained, "because of the moisture resistance that they provide, but not only that, they act as sound control. An upgraded underlayment can really avoid the clickity-clack sound of most laminate floors and, in some cases, even hardwood floors, so that they can both feel and sound a lot stronger and a lot better with the noise eliminated. "We have both pads, including the base grade that doesn't really do anything," he added. "About 60% to 70% of our customers don't upgrade, or only do so when required by specifications such as in a condominium or a high rise building."

Regarding the problems inherent in selling underlayment, Rodriguez noted, I ask all of my retailers to provide an upgraded pad under every single floor. "They use that as a selling feature to their customer saying, 'You're not just getting a base grade pad, you're getting something with the highest sound ratings in the industry.' Selling Tool "Sometimes they use it as a selling tool, and tell the customer, 'We are going to provide it for free for you in this job,' even though they do it for every single one. But some salespeople put so much emphasis on the floor, that they completely forget about upgrading the underlayment, which is extremely beneficial for the end user. I've even talked to them and given a few tips.

"One easy way is," he continued, "if you want to concentrate on the floor, concentrate on the floor, and right when you are done and Mrs. Jones is about to give you a check, all you have to do is say, 'Oh, by the way, which pad would you like under this floor,' then he can show her a basic base grade, two-in-one foam and film, and also show her an upgrade. Usually, the customer will ask, 'What is the difference going to be for me?' "The salesperson can mention the sound-deadening qualities," added Rodriguez. "An example would be a 1,000-sq.-ft. job. She might ask, 'How much more would this cost?' If the salesperson only sells it for \$.40 to \$.50 more, that's \$400 or \$500 more on a job that may be \$3,000 or \$4,000 at 10% or less. So, it's an easy upgrade. We still can't get them all to do it but we've gotten a bunch of them to upgrade."

Cushion and underlayment manufacturers, such as Leggett & Platt, offer several types of products for all types of flooring. According to its Web site, the company offers cushion such as bonded, fiber, premium, prime and rubber products, and this is just for residential broadloom. It also makes underlayment for laminate floors. John Morgan, national sales manager of No-Muv Corp., which specializes in underlayments for area rugs, said, "the first thing it does is, it prevents the rug from moving. The second thing it should do is, prevent the rug from

moving. The second thing it should do is, prevent the rug from wearing. And, in order to do that you have to have a cushioning effect. Most non-slips are so thin, they prevent the rug from moving, but they do not prevent rug wear. What we make, because of its thickness, it prevents rug wear. Don't Be Intimidated

"If those two attributes are described to the consumer," he explained, "she will, generally speaking, buy it. In my experience, over many years, it's not the customer that is intimidated by the price, it's the salesperson because he does not want to lose the sale. This is understandable, but it's still wrong." Morgan mentioned a recent Carpet Cushion Council (CCC) program, which was available as an insert inside Floor Covering News, as a good educational tool for all salespeople. "That is something that the salesperson, in any store, if they haven't read it, they really should. It will give them a lot of information as it is very clear. I would highly recommend it."

"It's very important for salespeople to put more emphasis on underlayment," said Bob Pratt, technical director for MP Global Products, "because it can increase their bottom line. They can upgrade the underlayment and basically, make a little more money on each individual sale. The characteristics that you are looking at, it improves the acoustical properties of the installation, the sound that goes from one level down to another, such as in a multi-family dwelling. "Plus," he added, "it also helps with the resonating sound within a room itself. When it comes to getting an upgraded pad, it makes a laminate floor sound more like real wood."

The major problem, he noted, as did Rodriguez and Morgan, happens at the point of purchase. "The salesperson is reluctant to bring it up, to let the customer know that there is an option, other than just spending the less amount initially. You divide it up over the life of the floor per square foot, and it becomes minuscule, the added amount that is paid for an upgraded pad." Companies such as MP Global, which early on focused on manufacturing synthetic carpet cushion, have more recently placed its efforts into the research and development of acoustical underlayments for hard surface flooring.

"Our QuietWalk rapidly became a leading upgrade underlayment in the laminate flooring industry," said Pratt. "The successes of QuietWalk led us to develop other innovative products. We think of ourselves as problem solvers, specifically in the area of moisture protection and sound deadening. Increasingly, more architects and designers are specifying underlayments from MP Global into high-rise apartment buildings and condominiums. MP Global, much like many other underlayment manufacturers, has placed an increased emphasis on being environmentally friendly.

"Most of the underlayments we manufacture are made with post industrial/pre-consumer fibers," said Pratt, "materials that would otherwise have been disposed of in landfills. These same products can again be recycled through our manufacturing process by 're-grinding' the padding into fibers again, and mixing them back into newly produced goods, truly making them 'green - green' merchandise. "Furthermore," he concluded, "these pads contain no VOCs. Our low-melt process uses binder fibers instead of resins, and the results are a non-allergenic product with no chemical smell."