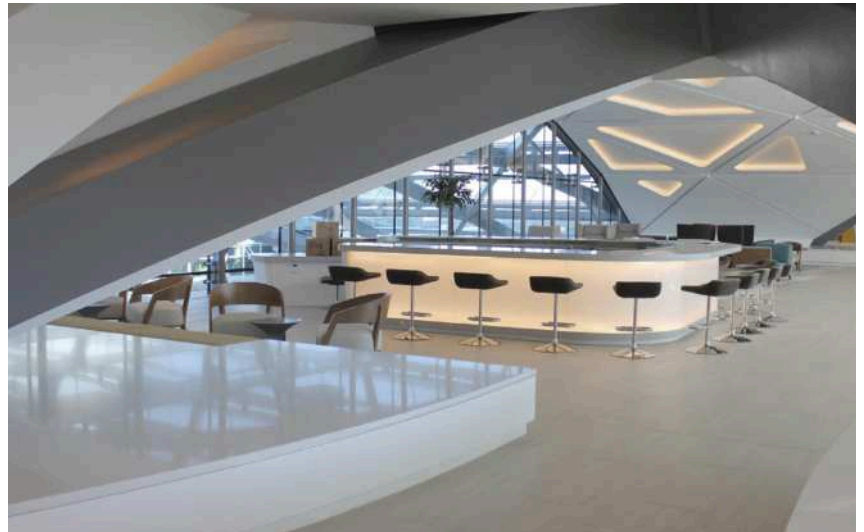


Crucial Role of Floor Prep in Construction: A Path to Quality

Floor preparation is the crucial initial step in the flooring installation process, where the condition of existing flooring is assessed to ensure it is suitable for the chosen flooring material. This involves tasks such as cleaning, leveling, and repairing the substrate to create a smooth and stable surface. Floor prep is the foundation upon which the beauty, durability and longevity of flooring is built, and is often considered the unsung hero of the construction industry.



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A pristine result for this large-format tile installation was achieved with zero lippage because self-leveling floor preparation occurred.

It's a task that may not garner much attention, but its significance cannot be overstated. Without proper floor preparation, the final installation can suffer from imperfections, variations in the subfloor and even safety hazards. In this article, we will explore the critical role of floor preparation in construction and how it can make or break a project.

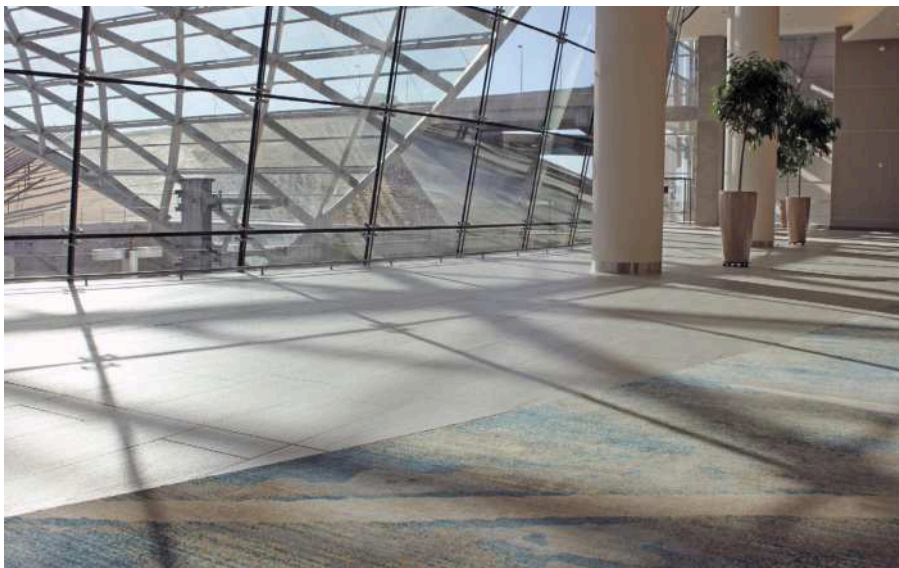
■ **The unseen imperfections.** Imagine a pristine room with brand-new flooring. At first glance, everything appears perfect, but under certain lighting conditions, imperfections become glaringly obvious. Resilient flooring, in particular, has a knack for magnifying even the tiniest of flaws in the subfloor. A speck of sand can resemble a pebble, ruining the aesthetic appeal. Porcelain tile specifications, with their ever-increasing sizes, exacerbate

this issue. High and low spots in the subfloor can lead to lippage at joints, not only making the installation look bad but also creating potential trip and fall hazards. Even carpet, known for its forgiving nature, can reveal imperfections in the floor surface.

■ **Division discrepancies.** In new construction projects, the differences between Division 3 (concrete) and Division 9 (finishes) can be as vast as the Grand Canyon. Many specifications call for the application of curing compounds on freshly poured concrete slabs, which serve the purpose of curing the concrete but can hinder the bonding of flooring adhesives and thinset. Consequently, flooring subcontractors often find themselves in the position of having to scarify or bead blast the concrete to open the pores and enable proper adhesion, a crucial factor for a warrantable installation.

Additionally, Division 3 specifications may include instructions for power troweling or steel troweling the new concrete, resulting in a burnished, nonporous surface. And again, because most adhesives and thinsets require a porous substrate for a successful bond, failing to achieve this can put the installation warranty at risk.

■ **The path to quality assurance.** Moisture testing may seem like something that only needs to be done on a new concrete substrate, but as many are realizing, this is a critical part of



Extensive floor preparation was required for this project that featured radiant heating under the large format tile.

floor prep because the Front Range has a lot of areas with high water tables (a geological feature where rock and ground materials join the upper soil layer due to an excessive amount of water beneath it). High water tables, in conjunction with a missing or failing vapor barrier, can cause a floor to fail.

Skim coating of the floor is another best practice for quality assurance. A skim coat is used to smooth the floor's surface to reduce the telegraphing of subfloor irregularities through the new resilient flooring. This is something that should be done regardless of whether the subfloor is virgin concrete or 40 years old.

Attention also must be given to any old adhesives that are left on the floor post-removal of old flooring. Depending on what new material is getting installed, there is a possibility that a chemical reaction can occur between the old adhesives and the plasticizers in the backing of new carpet tiles. This is called plasticizer migration and can lead to installation failure. Failure to properly prepare the subfloor will not be covered by the manufacturer's warranty.

■ **The importance of training and education.** Choosing educated and well-trained flooring contractors is another

way to improve quality assurance. A newly created Floorz Certified Install Program elevates the skill and expertise of subcontractor partners, setting them up for success. These programs invite select installers to work with a variety of flooring products, including sheet vinyl, carpet tile and porcelain tile, all within controlled custom-made environments. In these programs, installers undergo rigorous quality control assessments and evaluations by manufacturer representatives. Only those who pass these stringent criteria are awarded a certificate of completion specific to the type of flooring (resilient, carpet, tile).

■ **Conclusion.** Floor preparation may not be the most glamorous aspect of construction, but it is undoubtedly one of the most crucial. Neglecting proper floor preparation can lead to visible imperfections, safety hazards, and costly corrective measures. In today's construction landscape, a focus on floor preparation, from meticulous specification analysis to the certification of skilled installers, is key to achieving superior quality and safety in construction projects, ensuring the foundation beneath our feet is solid, safe and aesthetically pleasing.\

