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Floor Preparation Estimates

WHAT GOES INTO THAT MAGIC NUMBER...

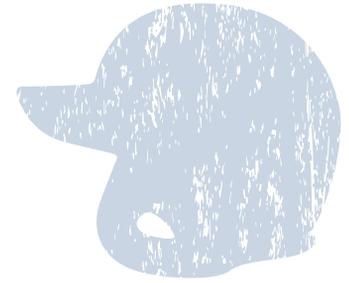
A flooring contractor can provide a ballpark estimate during a project's specification stage. But providing a hard quote for the actual cost is like predicting the score of a game when the first pitch is thrown.

Sure, player stats and team standings may be good indicators, but how any one game plays out can leave us in suspense until the bottom of the ninth. And so it is with floor preparation estimates. Every job is unique. Even with the benefit of a long experience curve, estimating involves a bit of a guestimating until the job is actually underway. This issue of *Starlog* will focus on subfloor preparation issues and floor installation estimates, which go together hand-in-glove.



UNDERSTANDING THE RULES OF THE GAME

Accurately estimating costs for a flooring installation project involves a combination of factors. Although most normal subfloor preparation steps can be anticipated and therefore estimated before the project begins, game-changing situations such as actual job site conditions and subfloor variables can lead to additional, unanticipated costs. The more you understand how a professional flooring company estimates a project, the more you'll appreciate the complexities of preparing an accurate cost.



1. WHAT FLOORS ARE SPECIFIED?

Different types of floorcoverings require different degrees of subfloor preparation, and the installation estimate will reflect that. Estimates should be floor-product specific, including each product's installation methods and materials.

2. WHAT DOES THE JOB SITE LOOK LIKE?

Scouting the actual job site should be standard business practice. A thorough construction site analysis starts to compile important stats that affect costs.

3. WHAT VARIABLES ARE INVOLVED IN NEW CONSTRUCTION?

If construction hasn't yet begun, the flooring contractor's estimate is subject to change as the actual "playing field" conditions are revealed.

4. WHAT VARIABLES ARE INVOLVED IN RENOVATION/REMODEL PROJECTS?

What's under the existing floorcovering? For many remodeling projects, an estimate cannot

be generated until the current floorcovering is removed and the entire subfloor examined. Only then can the flooring contractor see the conditions and estimate accordingly.

5. WHAT KIND OF SUBSTRATE IS THE FLOOR GOING OVER?

Some substrates are easier to install new flooring over than others. Some surfaces require more intensive treatments, while some might not even be appropriate for the floorcovering, such as the wrong type or thickness of plywood.

6. WHAT IS THE SUBSTRATE CONDITION?

Is it clean, smooth and ready to receive the floorcovering? If not, how much time, labor and materials will it take to make the substrate acceptable? For example, concrete slabs in renovation projects may require more and/or different preparation than new slabs. There may be irregularities that need to be remedied by grinding, patching or skim coating to keep defects from "telegraphing" through to the surface of the floorcovering.

FAIR OR FOUL — WHAT IS AND WHAT IS NOT — NORMAL SUBFLOOR PREPARATION?

Because of the variables that can unfold once a job is underway, it's not unusual for subfloor preparation challenges to arise on almost any job. But if those issues take a funny hop, nobody seems willing to field the ball. Who is responsible? A professional floorcovering contractor will explain and document what is considered normal subfloor preparation, and therefore, what is included in your estimate. When the preparation goes into "extra innings," it is indeed an added expense. Whether the flooring contractor handles the added work himself or subcontracts it to another professional, the added time, materials and labor should be reflected as a change order that will be added to the original estimated cost.

7. WHAT SERVICES ARE INCLUDED IN THE ESTIMATE?

Your estimate should include an explanation of what is "fair" and expected in subfloor preparation, and what is considered "foul." Plus, an awareness that change orders and additive costs may be unavoidable—even when you use the most professional contractor—is simply fair play.

8. HAS THE CONCRETE BEEN TESTED FOR MOISTURE/PH LEVELS?

Concrete subfloors are well-known for creating floorcovering failures if they're too "green" for receiving a floor, or, even after curing, they still emit too much moisture. There might even be a need for expensive moisture mitigation measures. (See *Starlog* Volume 7, Issue 2, at www.starnetflooring.com.)

9. DOES THE FLOORING CONTRACTOR HAVE THE EXPERIENCE TO HANDLE THE JOB?

There's simply no "pinch hitting" for knowledge. A Starnet Member brings major league flooring industry experience to each and every job. He's an experienced professional who networks with others on the Starnet team to ensure your total job satisfaction.

NORMAL PREP COSTS INCLUDE...

- **MINOR SUBFLOOR REPAIRS** This includes: patching floor areas that are chipped or cracked, or holes that are approximately three inches in diameter, or less than one half inch in depth, or an equivalent volume; repairing concrete saw cuts, concrete construction joints and hairline shrinkage cracks. It is customary to include the cost for these minor mends in an estimate, as these types of job site repairs are quite normal for any floorcovering project.
- **SMOOTH FLOORS, BUT NOT NECESSARILY LEVEL FLOORS** Most floorcoverings require a flat and smooth subfloor. Smoothing a subfloor is considered normal preparation. If an installation requires a level subfloor, the preparation steps, and therefore the cost, will be significantly higher. Fortunately, a level subfloor floor is not a requirement for most installations.

NORMAL PREP COSTS DO NOT INCLUDE...

- **CLEANUP NECESSITATED BY OTHER TRADES**
The flooring contractor is not responsible for materials, equipment or trash left behind by other contractors. Nor is he responsible for cleaning foreign substances and residue from the subfloor, such as overspray from pipefitters. Removing dirt and debris is not only time-consuming, it's expensive.
- **MAJOR SUBFLOOR REPAIRS** Unlike minor repairs which are anticipated, a job site might reveal surprises that fall into "major league" repairs. These include: concrete subfloors with large fissures and cracks that need filling, or a surface that is excessively rough, requiring extensive smoothing. Poor-grade plywood subfloors also create extra work because the wood surface may need filling and/or sanding before the floorcovering can be installed.
- **CONCRETE MOISTURE AND pH TESTING** This procedure should be done before installing any floorcovering over concrete. In fact, it's required by practically every floorcovering manufacturer. The testing should be conducted by an independent third party who has demonstrated expertise in both moisture vapor emission and in situ humidity testing methods.
- **SPECIAL LIGHTING CONSIDERATIONS** Areas in front of window walls may have a high amount of daylighting that tends to magnify any subfloor irregularity. In sun-drenched spaces, even a textured carpet can show small imperfections, and therefore require extra subfloor preparation steps.

PICK A WINNING TEAM— YOUR STARNET PROFESSIONALS

Working with a proven team of professionals is the best way to ensure that all possible floor preparation bases are covered, estimated fairly and handled responsibly. As North America's largest and most respected "free agent" in the world of flooring contractor groups, Starnet members represent an all-star line-up of people, products, equipment and services. They'll prepare initial

project estimates that hold no surprises or hidden fees. And, once your project is underway, you can expect thorough documentation and explanations for any and all subfloor preparation issues and expenses. Starnet's goal is a well-managed game plan resulting in a win-win outcome for all. Play ball!



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