

Moisture Study

A newsletter on moisture-related issues with concrete slabs.

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It was a specifier who inspired me to be in this business from the beginning.

Moisture

Floor Failure

Bio Hazards

Lawsuits

Down Time

Evaluation

Testing

Prevention

The Specifier's Plight to Know

My career was inspired by a specifier I met 20 years ago who made it very clear to me that spec writers need to have knowledge about everything. He also believed that with all they have to assimilate, their knowledge of a subject may only be as good as the quality of vendors who call upon them.

Maybe with BIM and other great ideas of information sharing, that may not be the case so much anymore, but having a lot on the plate certainly hasn't changed. In a recent email conversation with a specifier I just met, he reverberated those sentiments, while reinforcing the goal I have in wanting to share information about slab moisture with you.

"Considering that we all have issues of compatibility, knowledge, and understanding among specifiers, manufacturers, architects/engineers, and owners on virtually EVERY element of a project is a nearly overwhelming concept. We are each limited by how much information we can retain, and so it is always a relief to see anyone get involved and try to get information out there to everyone else."

So why do I feel the Specifier has to know so much about the stupid concrete slab?! Maybe in part because "stupid pays, for what stupid does?" I admit, while I still don't really understand what Forest Gump's mom meant, I do know that your errors and omissions liability exposure depends on what you know, or don't know about this issue, and what you do with it.

I'm not talking about the mere physics of moisture in concrete, ladies and gentlemen, but the sociology of the matter.

The moisture issue is confusing to many people, especially owners, architects, specifiers, contractors, flooring contractors, floor covering manufacturers, and yes, I am including everyone. The confusion isn't *how* it works, it is about who's going to be making sure it isn't a problem and who is paying for it when it is.

When a floor fails it usually becomes a legal matter due to the high costs involved with down-time loss. Everything gets the fine tooth comb. Documents do not always protect people. It often comes down to who should have been minding the store.

The plight of the specifier is that they DO know so much about everything. When all other resources get exhausted, it is easy to proclaim that the architect/specifier should have known the most about the problem and to protect the client from it. True or not.

This is why I write, and lecture, and often plead with people to address this, and because its all preventable. The specifier has the power of the pen, and this is a good purpose for that use.

The need to understand about moisture control of slabs has been a serious subject for longer than most people may realize-

"Changes and new developments in building construction during the past few decades have brought about an increasing need for control of moisture... Failure to control moisture migration from the ground often results in serious damage to the building. It may cause... deterioration of adhesives bonding floor finish material to slab-on-ground floors"

- The US Housing and Home Finance Agency, 1954.

I was not even born (ok, just yet) when that prophecy was published. Imagine what the authors would say if they knew that billions have been lost due to this truth, and mostly because it is one of those things you don't think about until it happens to you.

I realize that one of the problems specifiers have is first getting the information they need and then secondly having the audience with their client to explain why it needs to be put in the specs.

On Linked-In recently, there has been some interesting discussion about the challenge to get owners/clients to communicate more with specifiers. I dared not suggest "specify moisture sealers and you'll get an audience alright", but it is probably true.

Unfortunately, most owners I meet are on job sites where a floor has already failed. It takes me about 5 minutes to explain the whole problem to them and about 10 more minutes of them scolding me as to why the architect didn't know about this and why I am not doing more to get info out to people like them. Sigh. Hear that a lot.

So, where to start? First, don't pawn this off onto whatever the floor covering product manufacturer says or worse yet, onto the floor covering contractor. What could go wrong with that, that hasn't been going wrong already since 1954?!

Rather, designate a specific section for moisture testing and moisture mitigation that is separate and uniquely treats this as part of the overall building construction.

Where to put it is often pretty much driven by what vendors want, since CSI has not really created a formal division for this... hint hint. So I give kudos to my buddy Colin Gilboy at 4specs for having the insight to just create Division 09-6105 where it should go, just before floor covering and not lost in thermal (07) or concrete (03).

When you are specifying a program for testing and mitigation of slab moisture, you are showing your clients that you are acting in behalf of their best interest. Please visit us online or contact us directly with any questions you may have.