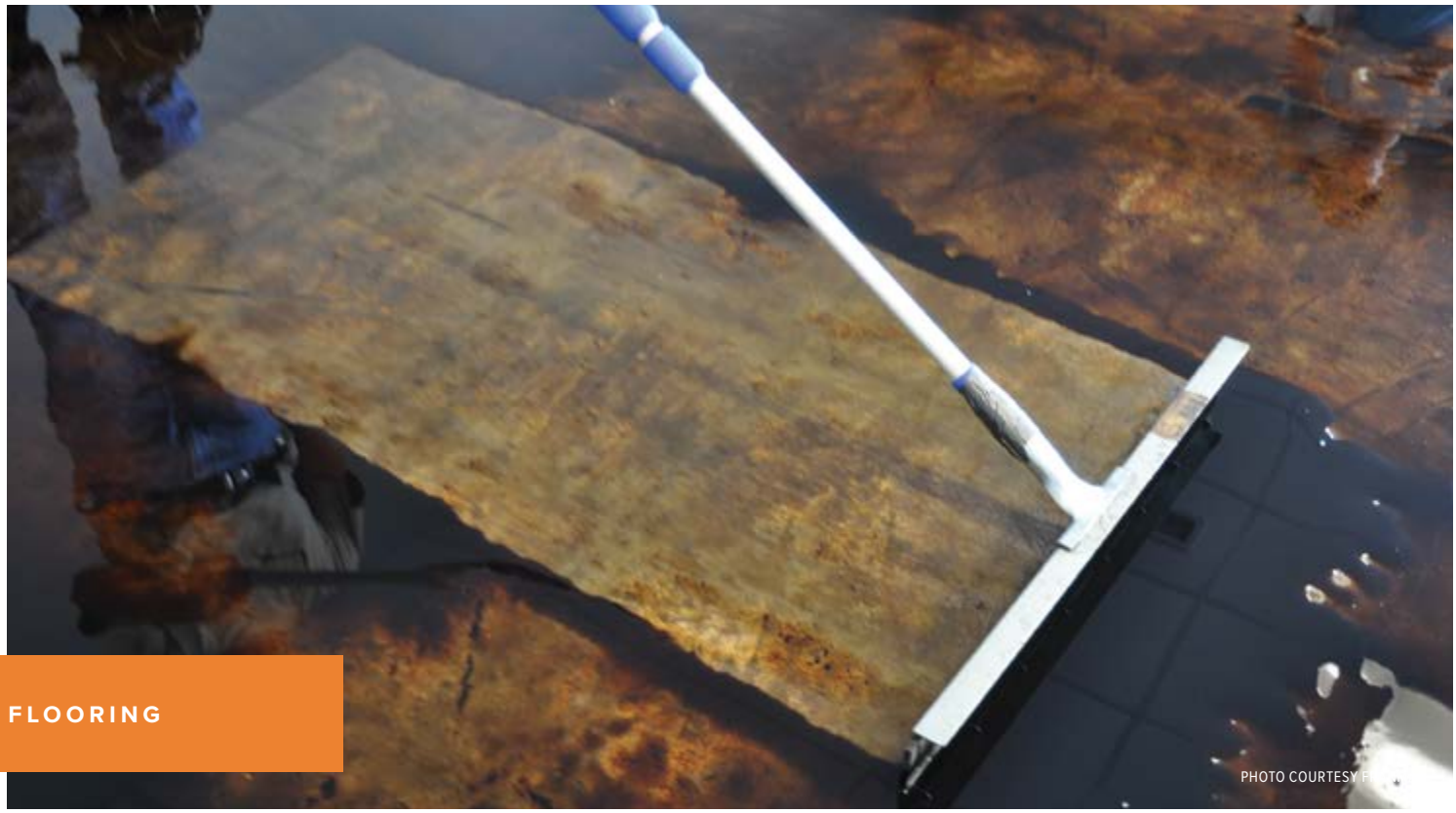

FLOORING

Campus Floors: Prep, Protect, Perform
Expert Advice for Campus Floor-replacement Projects

BY FRANMAR

You only have one shot to get campus flooring right. Between the logistical puzzle of student traffic and the hidden dangers of legacy materials, the margin for error is zero. Is your team asking the right questions? We asked Franmar's Lane Henkins to break down the 10 essentials every facility manager needs to know before the demo begins.

1. What are the key considerations when removing existing flooring in an occupied campus building without disrupting daily operations?
Four things drive every decision on an occupied campus project: scheduling, containment, hazardous materials, and communication.

Scheduling comes first. Work must happen when the building isn't in use. Evenings, weekends and semester breaks keep demo away from occupied spaces. The tighter the occupancy schedule, the more carefully the work has to be sequenced.

Containment keeps the job site from becoming a problem for everyone else. Dust and debris stay inside the work zone. In larger buildings, it's best to section off areas in phases rather than opening up the entire floor at once.

Hazardous materials require testing before any removal starts. Older campus buildings commonly contain asbestos in resilient flooring, backing and adhesives. Mechanical removal methods, such as sanding or grinding, can release it. Know what's in the floor before you touch it. And when it's time to remove floor mastics, Franmar's BLUE BEAR® BEAN•e•doo® Mastic Remover is free of harsh chemicals and fumes, so it's ideal for use in campus buildings and other indoor settings.

Communication is what holds the rest together. Building staff and occupants need to know what's happening, where and when. Surprises on an active campus can create more disruption than the work itself.

2. How do we determine whether our existing subfloor is suitable for new tile or luxury vinyl tile, and what preparation is typically required?
Three conditions have to be reviewed carefully: moisture, flatness, and surface condition. All three matter, and all three need to be verified before installation begins.

Moisture testing is required every time, regardless of subfloor type. Wood, concrete, gypcrete and other materials each behave differently. What looks dry can still hold or transmit enough moisture to affect adhesive performance.

Flatness tolerances for tile and LVT are tight. The surface typically can't vary more than ⅛-inch over a 6-foot span. High spots get ground down and low areas get filled. The surface also has to be clean and free of adhesive residue before anything bonds to it.

Get all three right and the installation has a foundation to perform on. Miss one and the product doesn't matter.

3.What are the cost differences between installing ceramic/porcelain tile versus LVT when factoring in demolition, prep and labor?

Labor and preparation drive most of the cost in both options. The product itself is rarely the largest line item.

LVT installs faster. It has fewer steps, less complexity and lower labor cost per square foot. Tile requires layout, mortar, grouting and cure time. That process takes longer and adds up in labor hours. All in all, LVT typically costs less than tile when you factor in installation.

Subfloor condition is the biggest cost variable in either case. If the substrate needs moisture mitigation, significant leveling or structural repair, those costs can exceed the difference between the two products entirely. Budget without a thorough site assessment and you could miss the biggest cost on the project.

4. How long does a typical flooring replacement project take—from removal to final installation—and how can we best phase the project across multiple buildings?

Preparation almost always takes longer than installation. Plan for that up front.

Moisture testing, subfloor correction and adhesive removal each take time. For a single well-prepped area, a crew can complete installation in a few days. Full-building projects run several weeks. Multi-building campus projects extend over months, and that's fine when it's built into the plan from the start.

Phase by substrate readiness, not by building sequence. The key is not treating every building the same. Test each substrate independently. Conditions vary from building to building, and a schedule built on assumptions about one space can fall apart in the next.

Sequence the work so crews are always moving into a prepped area, not waiting on one. Idle crews are one of the most avoidable costs on a campus project.

5. What moisture mitigation strategies should be considered before installing LVT or tile, especially in older campus buildings?

Test before you plan, not after. Older buildings have unpredictable subfloor conditions, and moisture behavior varies depending on what you're working with. Don't assume a floor is

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dry because it hasn't shown problems before.

When test results exceed manufacturer limits for moisture or pH, you have two primary options: apply a moisture barrier prior to installation or use a moisture-tolerant adhesive system rated for elevated readings. Which approach is appropriate depends on the subfloor type and how far out of range the readings are.

Addressing moisture before installation costs a fraction of what it costs to remediate after the floor is down.

6. How do ceramic tile and LVT compare in terms of durability, maintenance requirement and lifecycle cost in high-traffic areas like student unions and residence halls?
Both products perform well in high-traffic campus environments. The difference is in how they perform and what they cost to maintain over time.

Ceramic tile is the more durable option. It resists water, chemicals and heavy wear, and carries a longer service life in demanding applications. The trade-off is grout: it stains, cracks and requires ongoing maintenance. Repairs are also more labor-intensive when they're needed.

LVT handles heavy foot traffic well and offers simpler maintenance. There's no grout to manage, and individual sections can be replaced without disturbing the surrounding floor. But it's more vulnerable to heavy rolling loads and certain chemicals, which matters in specific spaces. Instead of saying vulnerable, can we say can be damaged by heavy rolling loads? Does the thickness of the LVT affect that?

For wet areas and dining facilities, tile typically wins on longevity. For residence halls and common areas, LVT often delivers a lower total cost of ownership over the life of the installation. The best choice depends on what that specific space demands.

7. What are the best practices for managing dust, noise and safety concerns during demolition and installation in active campus environments?
Work off-hours. That's the most effective practice available. Scheduling demo and installation during evenings, weekends and breaks keeps the loudest and dustiest work away from occupied areas.

Containment controls dust migration. Plastic barriers and negative air pressure systems keep particles out of adjacent spaces. Choosing safer solvents, like those in Franmar's BLUE BEAR commercial line, can also help reduce risk. For flooring or adhesive that contains asbestos, full abatement protocols are required.

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Noise management follows the same logic as scheduling. Grinding and mechanical removal are the loudest operations. Save those for the lowest occupancy windows available and communicate the schedule to building management in advance.

Safety on an active campus goes beyond signage. Secure the perimeter with physical barriers, not just tape. Keep all tools, equipment and removed material contained within the work zone. Debris in a pedestrian path is a liability. Make sure every person on the crew knows the site boundaries and that those boundaries are enforced throughout the project.

8. Are there sustainable or LEED-friendly options available for both tile and LVT, including recycling or reusing old flooring materials?

Both categories have viable options, and the choices have improved significantly in recent years.

For new installations, look for products with Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs), recycled content and low-VOC certifications, such as FloorScore® or GREENGUARD Gold. These contribute to LEED credits under materials and indoor air quality categories. And they're increasingly available from major manufacturers in both tile and LVT.

For removed flooring, ask your supplier or manufacturer about reclamation programs before demo begins. Several manufacturers will take back old material for recycling rather than sending it to a landfill.

Beyond certification, selecting products with longer service lives and lower maintenance requirements reduces long-term environmental impact in ways that don't always show up in upfront sustainability metrics. Durability is its own form of sustainability.

9. What installation methods (floating, glue-down or mortar-set) are best suited for different campus applications, and how do they impact future repairs or replacements?

Glue-down handles most campus applications because it's stable under heavy traffic and rolling loads. And individual sections can be replaced without touching the surrounding floor. It's the most serviceable option over time.

Mortar-set is for permanent installations where durability and moisture resistance matter most: dining facilities, entryways, wet areas. It performs well for decades but is significantly harder to remove or modify. Factor that in if there's any chance the space will be repurposed.

Floating systems work when speed matters and the subfloor is controlled. The risk is flatness tolerance. If the substrate is off, the floor will move and joints will eventually fail. Repairs are straightforward when the product is still available, but matching discontinued product years later is a common problem.

10. What common mistakes should facility managers avoid when planning a flooring replacement project, particularly when transitioning from tile to LVT or vice versa?

The most common mistake is treating the existing floor as a reliable indicator of subfloor condition.

A floor that performed well for years doesn't mean the substrate is ready for the next system. Tile and LVT have different requirements for moisture tolerance and flatness. What the previous product could handle, the new one may not, regardless of what the subfloor material is.

Start with the substrate. Test it, measure it, and assess it as if nothing has ever been installed on top of it. Then select your product and your prep approach based on what you find.

Cut the prep budget, and you're shortening the life of the floor before it's even installed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Franmar delivers safer, high-performance cleaning solutions for facility maintenance teams, using soy-based chemistry to replace harsh chemicals—helping colleges and universities maintain buildings effectively while protecting occupant health, staff safety, and environmental standards.

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