

JLC Online

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— The Editors

MATERIALS & TECHNIQUES

PT Plywood Subflooring

• **Posted by Steve:**

I have a client who insists on using PT ply as a subfloor over PT sleepers on a basement slab. Any suggestions to help talk them out of this?

◦ **Followup posted by Kevin:**

I would at least have them sign a waiver stating that you do not recommend this and releasing you from any future harmful health effects.

◦ **Followup posted by Keith:**

This is as bad as a doctor giving you a prescription you don't need. I suppose PT plywood has a purpose, but I certainly wouldn't use it if I didn't have to, particularly inside a residence. If your customer wants to spend the money, there are much better options available. The quality of plywood products today is bad enough, and when I look at that stuff in the lumberyard, it warrants a material quality rating of "crap" from me. You can't use it for animal shelters, so why put it in a house? (If it ain't fit for pigs...then who?) This is another oversold product and offers nothing when compared to doing a job with the right materials and sound construction techniques. Interior environment has been a concern for many years now and maybe your customers don't know what they're asking for. Finished basements can produce an unhealthy atmosphere easily enough, and using products containing dangerous chemicals can only be considered poor judgement.

Maybe what you should do is have them sign waivers of liability and not guarantee the PT plywood or any product installed over it. Appeal to their better judgment and educate them a little, because you know if you don't do the job because of this, unfortunately someone else will. Hope this helps.

◦ **Followup posted by Dave:**

PT plywood inside a home is a bad option. If a fire occurs, it puts out poisonous vapors. Also, some local codes do not allow this option.

◦ **Followup posted by Scott:**

Assuming you have attempted the obvious by quoting the price to your client, I wouldn't think treated plywood is a good substrate for all flooring materials — for example, wood flooring — because treated plywood may have a higher moisture content than other subfloors. I would contact the manufacturer to get the specification for the flooring products you will use. I know for a fact that tile requires CDX plywood.

I'm not sure, but the off-gassing may be a problem with treated plywood, as it is treated with arsenic. I do know for sure that the use of treated plywood indoors is not allowed where direct contact can be made, especially where food may be stored or prepared.

◦ **Followup posted by Kurt:**

As Scott suggested, hit 'em with the off-gassing issue. I didn't know that building with pressure-treated lumber in a confined, conditioned space was that big a deal. But this past summer I put a small addition on a house and the lumber company made a mistake and sent pressure-treated for all my 2-by-stock. I called them to make them aware of their mistake and they automatically replaced it with standard dry lumber, because of the off-gassing. Hope this helps!

◦ **Followup posted by John:**

I agree that it's probably unwise to use that much PT inside. If they expect that much moisture, they should reconsider the value of finishing the basement.

Finishing Drywall with a Sponge

• **Posted by Nathan:**

I'm installing 1,000 sq. ft. of drywalled partitions in a working office, and would like to try finishing the surface with a sponge, rather than sanding, to avoid wreaking too much havoc with computers, etc. It seems like it might be quite a bit slower, however. Anybody tried this on a large scale?

◦ **Followup posted by Geoff:**

Have you considered using blueboard with skim coat

veneer plaster finish instead? It is dustless except when mixing, which can be done outside, and it cures ready for primer in a day. One drawback is you need a skilled plasterer to do the skim coating, and it does give off a lot of moisture while curing, but the finish is superior and more durable. IMHO [*in my humble opinion*], it is also quicker to the paint phase, since you don't have to wait for coats to dry, sand, dry, sand.... Joints are done with Dura-bond 90 or the like, and by the time they are done you can start skimming in the afternoon, dry overnight, and paint the next day. Let us know your thoughts on this method, I've had great success with it.

◦ Followup posted by Kevin:

How does the cost of the plaster job compare with the cost of three coats on drywall?

◦ Followup posted by Geoff:

The material costs are about the same, no more than 35¢ per sheet more for blueboard, at least in the Boston area. As for the labor costs, it is more expensive, but only marginally. For example, a 19x32-foot two-story Cape cost \$2,300 and was complete in two days; painting started two days later. That time did not include hanging the board, but did include the plasterer applying the corner bead and all taping. The crew was three men the first day and four men on the second. In my opinion, this is far more cost effective than gray board.

◦ Followup posted by Kevin:

That sounds like a pretty good option. It does seem that plaster is widely done in your area of New England, while here in central Connecticut it is not seen very often in residential construction. Even in some of the higher-end homes in Fairfield County, the predominant interior finish seems to be drywall rather than plaster. Thanks for the info.

◦ Followup posted by Jeff:

I have tried using sponges to finish drywall and was not pleased with the results. The sponge loaded up quickly, so a lot of time was spent rinsing out. Also, if the sponge was too damp, it would leave streaks in the compound. I have had very good results using a vacuum when sanding drywall. There are systems made by Porter-Cable and others that are very fast and produce good results. For a less expensive option, hook a hand-held sander up to your shop vac. Pleated filters seem to work better, but still need to be cleaned frequently.

◦ Followup posted by Nathan:

Thanks everyone for the suggestions. The job was finished with a combination of improved techniques and new tools. Using a wide curved trowel, I kept each of the three or four coats as thin and carefully feathered as possible, then sanded with my orbital attached to a new shop vacuum. This kept sanding to a minimum, and the vac captured all but the tiniest amount of dust. The job (and Geoff's initial response) reminded me of my vow to use blueboard and veneer plaster whenever possible, especially on large areas. I think the amount of touch-up and fiddling required to obtain a really good surface with drywall brings it even closer to the hassle-free square-foot cost of plaster.

BUSINESS STRATEGIES

Estimating Drywall

• Posted by Pete:

An old drywaller gave me this formula for estimating the number of 4x12 sheets needed on a job: Take your floor square footage, multiply by 3.5, then divide that by 48. Anyone tried this? How accurate is it? Any other formulas?

◦ Posted by Larry:

My rocker uses 3.7 per sq. ft., but buys a variety of sizes to minimize waste.

◦ Posted by Alan:

If your man can hang at that ratio, he must be buying the rock himself. I use 4-4.5 per sq. ft., to get a quick and dirty budget number, but in my region (D.C. area), hangers are often piece-workers. I have seen crews doing a simple two-bedroom apartment have an immense pile of scrap left over (they very likely cut up whole sheets just to get paid for hanging them). But I've also seen crews hang a chopped up attic addition, with vaulted ceilings, and have no more scrap left over than you could haul out in a single trash can.

◦ Posted by Mike:

The 4-4.5 formula works for me also, but I'm always thinking about how to use even larger sheets to be more efficient.