



Five Questions Worth Asking **Before Your Next** Commercial Flooring Project

A planning guide for facility managers, operations directors,
procurement teams & capital planners

30+ YEARS OF COMMERCIAL FLOORING EXPERTISE · OHIO · KENTUCKY · INDIANA

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SCAN TO VISIT

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WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

- ✓ Facility Managers & Directors
- ✓ Operations Managers
- ✓ Capital Planning Teams
- ✓ Procurement Groups
- ✓ Architects & General Contractors
- ✓ Property Managers

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was developed by the team at Axis Interior Systems, based on more than 30 years of commercial flooring experience across Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana.

It is intended as an educational resource, not a sales document, and is free to share with your planning team.

INTRODUCTION

Why This Guide Exists

Most commercial flooring problems are traced back to a decision made in the first thirty days of a project, long before anyone chose a material, a color, or a contractor.

They're planning problems. A moisture test that got skipped to save a week. A subfloor assumption that turned out to be wrong. A schedule that didn't account for cure times. None of these show up in a sample book, and none of them get caught by picking the "right" flooring product.

After more than three decades of walking facilities before, during, and after flooring installations, we've noticed the projects that go well and the ones that don't tend to separate long before installation day. The difference usually isn't the product. It's the questions someone did or didn't ask during planning.

"The difference between a project that goes well and one that doesn't usually separates long before installation day."



Resinous flooring applied on site — the outcome of decisions made months earlier.

WHY PLANNING MATTERS MORE THAN MATERIAL SELECTION

Material performance matters, but every material, even the best one, will underperform or fail if it's installed over an unprepared subfloor, in the wrong moisture conditions, or on a schedule that doesn't allow for proper cure and acclimation.

Facility teams that get the best long-term results start with conditions: what's happening beneath the slab, what the space is used for, how much disruption the schedule can absorb, and who will maintain the floor once it's installed. Material selection comes after those questions are answered, not before.

QUESTION 01 OF 05

What Do We Actually Know About Moisture?

A hidden risk in any building, regardless of age

01

Moisture is the single most common cause of flooring failure in commercial buildings, and it affects buildings of every age. New construction slabs can still be curing and releasing moisture years after the pour. Older buildings may have vapor barriers that have degraded, changed grading, or plumbing conditions that have entirely shifted the moisture profile of the slab.

The problem is that moisture issues are invisible until they aren't. A slab can look, feel, and test dry to the naked eye and still be releasing enough vapor to cause adhesive failure, cupping, discoloration, or odor months after installation.

WHAT PLANNING SHOULD INCLUDE

- ✓ In-situ relative humidity (RH) testing per ASTM F2170, not just surface readings
- ✓ Calcium chloride testing where appropriate, with an understanding of its limitations vs. RH testing
- ✓ A review of the building's history: prior water intrusion, plumbing issues, or previous flooring failures
- ✓ A moisture mitigation strategy built into the budget and schedule *before bid*, not added after a failed test

COMMON MISTAKE

Skipping moisture testing to save a few days early in a project is one of the most expensive shortcuts a team can take.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Mitigation systems, when planned for, are a line item. When discovered after installation, they're a demolition and do-over, at a cost that routinely exceeds the original flooring budget.

QUESTION 02 OF 05

What Is the Actual Condition of the Subfloor?

The most overlooked cause of cost overruns

02

Subfloor condition is the most overlooked cause of cost overruns in commercial flooring, largely because it's difficult to assess from a walkthrough. A slab can appear flat and sound while hiding cracks, spalling, unevenness outside of flatness tolerances, or old adhesive residue from a previous installation that will interfere with a new one.

Every flooring material has different subfloor tolerances. Resilient flooring and epoxy systems are particularly unforgiving of flatness deviations; carpet tile is more forgiving but still requires a sound, properly prepared substrate.

WHAT PLANNING SHOULD INCLUDE

- ✓ A subfloor assessment as part of pre-bid due diligence, not a post-demolition surprise
- ✓ Flatness and levelness testing appropriate to the flooring system being considered (ASTM F710)
- ✓ A realistic allowance in the budget for surface preparation, even on buildings that look fine
- ✓ Coordination with the general contractor on who is responsible for subfloor prep and remediation

KEY TAKEAWAY

A thorough subfloor assessment early in planning is one of the most reliable ways to protect a project's budget and timeline. Schedule it before bid, not after demolition begins.



Old adhesive residue being removed ahead of a new installation.

QUESTION 03 OF 05

Have We Calculated Lifecycle Cost, Not Just Upfront Cost?

Rarely calculated correctly during the planning stage



03

Upfront cost is easy to compare across bids. Lifecycle cost, the total cost of a flooring system over its expected service life, including maintenance, cleaning, repairs, and replacement, is rarely calculated correctly during planning, and it's often not calculated at all.

A lower upfront price can carry a significantly higher lifecycle cost if the material requires more frequent replacement, specialized maintenance products, or more labor-intensive cleaning protocols. Conversely, a higher upfront investment can be the more economical choice over a 10- to 15-year horizon in high-traffic areas.

WHAT PLANNING SHOULD INCLUDE

- ✓ An estimated service life for each material, based on the specific traffic and use conditions of the space
- ✓ Maintenance requirements and their real cost: labor hours, equipment, and consumables
- ✓ Replacement or refinishing cycles factored into capital planning, not treated as a surprise expense
- ✓ A side-by-side lifecycle comparison, not just a bid comparison, presented to decision-makers before selection

KEY TAKEAWAY

For capital planning teams and procurement groups working within multi-year budgets, this comparison often changes the recommended material entirely.



Ceramic tile in a heritage building — specified for a service life measured in decades.

QUESTION 04 OF 05

How Does Our Schedule Actually Affect the Project?

Your timeline influences material selection, installation methods, and overall success



04

Flooring installation is rarely the constraint that gets the most scheduling attention, but it's often the trade most sensitive to timeline compression. Cure times, adhesive dry times, and acclimation periods are governed by physics and manufacturer specifications, not by how quickly a project needs to move.

Facility type matters here too. A healthcare facility, a school on a summer break window, or a 24/7 operations center each impose very different scheduling constraints around noise, fumes, access, and phasing, and all of that should inform material selection and installation methodology well before bid.

WHAT PLANNING SHOULD INCLUDE

- ✓ A realistic installation timeline built backward from cure and acclimation requirements, not forward from a desired completion date
- ✓ An honest conversation about which materials and methods fit the available access windows (nights, weekends, phased occupancy)
- ✓ Coordination with other trades so flooring isn't installed before HVAC balancing or over a slab that hasn't reached appropriate moisture levels
- ✓ Contingency time built into the schedule for testing, remediation, or weather-related delays in temperature and humidity-sensitive installations

KEY TAKEAWAY

A schedule that doesn't account for cure and acclimation realities produces a rushed installation, and rushed installations are where quality problems concentrate.

QUESTION 05 OF 05

Is Our Team Actually Ready to Maintain This Investment?

Maintenance readiness determines whether the investment reaches its full expected life

✓
05

A flooring system's performance doesn't end at installation. Maintenance readiness, whether the facility team has the right products, equipment, procedures, and training to care for the new floor, determines whether that investment lasts its full expected life or underperforms.

This question is frequently skipped because it feels like a "later" problem. In practice, maintenance protocols should be part of the material selection conversation, not an afterthought delivered with the closeout documents.

WHAT PLANNING SHOULD INCLUDE

- ✓ A maintenance plan matched to the specific material, not a generic cleaning protocol
- ✓ Confirmation that the facility team has, or can budget for, the correct equipment and cleaning products
- ✓ A walkthrough or training session with the installer or manufacturer before turnover
- ✓ Clear documentation the facility team can reference well after the installation crew has left

KEY TAKEAWAY

Floors that are maintained correctly from day one consistently outperform their rated service life. Floors that aren't often fall well short of it.



Routine burnishing — the difference between a floor that lasts and one that doesn't.

REAL-WORLD PATTERNS WE SEE REPEATEDLY

What Goes Wrong, and When

The "it looked fine" subfloor

A visually acceptable slab that failed flatness testing once measured, leading to a two-week delay for self-leveling underlayment that could have been scheduled in from the start.

The moisture test that got skipped

A project on a tight timeline that bypassed RH testing to hit a deadline, followed by adhesive failure and flooring replacement within eighteen months, at a cost far exceeding the time "saved."

The lifecycle surprise

A facility that selected the lowest bid material for a high-traffic corridor, only to replace it twice in the time a higher-upfront-cost alternative would have lasted once.

The maintenance gap

A newly installed floor showing premature wear within a year, traced back to a janitorial team using an incompatible cleaning product because no maintenance plan was ever handed off.

"None of these outcomes were caused by a bad product. They were caused by a question that didn't get asked early enough to change the plan."

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- ⊗ Treating material selection as the first decision instead of the last one
- ⊗ Skipping or minimizing moisture and subfloor testing to protect the schedule
- ⊗ Comparing bids on upfront cost alone
- ⊗ Finalizing a schedule before understanding cure and acclimation requirements
- ⊗ Leaving maintenance planning until after installation

PRACTICAL PLANNING TIPS

- ✓ Bring your flooring advisor into the conversation during design and budgeting, not after the bid is awarded
- ✓ Request testing (moisture and subfloor) as a line item in early planning, not as a contingency
- ✓ Ask every bidder for a lifecycle cost estimate alongside their upfront price
- ✓ Build cure and acclimation time into the master schedule before committing to a completion date
- ✓ Request a maintenance plan and training session as a deliverable, not an optional add-on

Pre-Project Planning Checklist

Print · Share · Complete before your project goes to bid

01 MOISTURE

- ☐ In-situ RH testing (ASTM F2170) ordered
- ☐ Calcium chloride testing scheduled where applicable
- ☐ Building history reviewed (water intrusion, plumbing, prior failures)
- ☐ Moisture mitigation strategy in budget before bid

03 LIFECYCLE COST

- ☐ Estimated service life reviewed for each material
- ☐ Maintenance cost estimated (labor, equipment, consumables)
- ☐ Replacement / refinishing cycle factored into capital plan
- ☐ Lifecycle comparison presented to decision-makers

05 MAINTENANCE READINESS

- ☐ Material-specific maintenance plan in contract scope
- ☐ Correct equipment and cleaning products confirmed / budgeted
- ☐ Pre-turnover walkthrough / training session scheduled
- ☐ Maintenance documentation handed off to facility team

02 SUBFLOOR CONDITION

- ☐ Pre-bid subfloor assessment completed
- ☐ Flatness / levelness testing specified (ASTM F710)
- ☐ Surface preparation allowance in budget
- ☐ Responsibility for subfloor prep confirmed with GC

04 PROJECT SCHEDULING

- ☐ Timeline built backward from cure and acclimation requirements
- ☐ Access windows confirmed (nights, weekends, phased)
- ☐ Flooring coordinated with other trades (HVAC, plumbing)
- ☐ Contingency time built into schedule for testing / remediation

06 BEFORE YOU GO TO BID

- ☐ Flooring advisor involved before bid awarded
- ☐ Lifecycle estimate requested from each bidder
- ☐ Testing requested as a line item, not a contingency
- ☐ Maintenance plan required as a contract deliverable

NOTES

ABOUT AXIS INTERIOR SYSTEMS

A Trusted Commercial Flooring Partner for Over 30 Years

Axis Interior Systems is a commercial flooring contractor serving Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana. We work across every major building sector, installing and maintaining commercial flooring systems of every type.

WHAT WE DO

- ◆ Athletic Flooring
- ◆ Carpeting & Resilient Flooring
- ◆ Ceramic Tile, Stone & Terrazzo
- ◆ Concrete, Resinous & Epoxy Flooring
- ◆ Floor Preparation & Moisture Control
- ◆ Walk-Off Entry Systems
- ◆ Static Control Flooring
- ◆ Reclamation & LEED Services

WHERE WE WORK

- ✓ Corporate
- ✓ Government
- ✓ Healthcare
- ✓ Higher Education
- ✓ Hospitality
- ✓ K-12 Schools
- ✓ Property Management
- ✓ Public Spaces
- ✓ Retail
- ✓ Assisted Living



Dayton Metro Library, Huber Heights — carpet tile installation.

TALK TO OUR TEAM

Need a second opinion before your next flooring project? Our team is always happy to help, no obligation, no sales pitch.

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