



FLOORING GOES “GREEN”

With environmental issues and concerns taking the forefront these days, we decided to talk to our flooring expert Steve Chase from Fitness Flooring to see what the nonprofits might do to better align their future building and product purchasing plans to assimilate “going green.”

OSF: There has certainly been an increasing emphasis on being “green” these days and that goes right down to the type of building materials that we use in our facilities. While there is not a lot that we can do about what has already been built, how can we at least be as green as possible in any expansions or renovations that we undertake?

CHASE: It’s been increasingly easier to build using the guidelines set forward by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design or LEED, which has been developed by the US Green Building Council. Their certification criteria are geared to minimize the impact of building on the environment, which runs the gamut from selecting building materials that are made from recycled products, to using products that can easily be recycled, to providing extra incentive to buy products that are manufactured near the building site, among other criteria.

While there are many more options to purchase building materials that are renewable than there were when LEED was first created, one of the problems for us in fitness was that there were limited options available for the performance flooring that is required in a fitness environment. However, as LEED becomes increasingly popular, newer options are becoming available that use more renewable materials and provide performance as good as those currently used in facilities that chose their sports flooring without LEED considerations taken into account.

OSF: What type of products are we talking about here? Give us an example.

CHASE: Well, let’s take rubber flooring for instance. Over the last 20 years, the rubber flooring industry has become the most sophisticated in utilizing recycled content. Earlier on, many


manufacturers turned to reground rubber from reclaimed tires to manufacture rolls of sheet rubber flooring because the raw materials were very available and as a result, fairly inexpensive, and this surfacing is still very popular today. This material is extremely useful in fitness because it hides dirt well, is easy to clean, does not harbor bacteria, and creates resilience and reduces fatigue for users.

Now, rubber flooring companies have progressed into sort of a second generation of utilizing recycled rubber by producing floors that are much more technologically advanced. These products are molded and provide much more shock absorption and resilience and are better suited for many weight areas, especially free weight areas where the possibility of dropping great amounts of weight is more likely. These floors are also typically more attractive than the rolled rubber floors as they can utilize more varieties of color. Additionally, since they are thicker, they are produced in modular tiles instead of sheets and are typically installed without adhesive so that they can be more easily taken up and reinstalled in a new area of the club.

OSF: A lot of the areas in the club have wood flooring, like our group exercise, Pilates, and basketball areas. There’s really little that can be done to make those areas out of more rapidly renewable products, is there?

CHASE: Wood is an inherently renewable product. The only problem is that the species that we utilize for flooring take somewhere between 40-60 years to grow back to a size in which they can be harvested. Most wood floor manufacturers are careful to buy raw materials only from responsibly managed forests and are good stewards of the environment. But what we would like to see are viable alternatives which renew themselves more rapidly than the hardwoods that we have used for flooring for generations.

In the last few years a couple of these types of floors have begun to emerge. One of the most promising has been the production



of bamboo flooring. Bamboo is a particularly attractive alternative because the species of bamboo that is used for flooring is so rapidly renewable with plants that are ready to be reharvested within about 3-5 years, rather than the decades that it takes to grow traditional hardwood species. Cork has also been a promising renewable resource, since it simply involves the stripping of the bark of the cork oak without damaging the tree, and this can be done about every 9-12 years. Unfortunately, it is more difficult to produce cork flooring with a perfectly smooth surface that is required for something like sports flooring.

OSF: But can a bamboo floor really be equal to the types of floors we're used to in fitness areas?

Admittedly, Bamboo flooring is a bit of a different product than a solid hardwood floor. While solid hardwoods are made of homogeneous pieces of wood, bamboo is made of strips of the bark that are shaved off and then amalgamated together. However, it still has all the working properties of hardwood in that it can be planed, sawn, and sanded, and stained and finished exactly the same as hardwood.

But all bamboo flooring is not made equally. There are some inexpensive bamboo surfaces that are available that are simply too soft to be used in a commercial floor. If you are considering purchasing bamboo flooring, it's important to ask the manufacturer for what is referred to as the Janka test for hardness. The results of their testing should be compared to that of maple, which is the most common species used in sports flooring.

The production of bamboo flooring has only recently gone from purely a residential surface into something with more performance characteristics and durability that make it suitable for use in fitness and sport. Manufacturers are now creating profiles that have even been able to pass the demanding sports safety requirements of the DIN Standards and have the physical characteristics of the more familiar maple flooring for sports, but yet come from an immensely more renewable source. **OSF**

For more information, Steve can be contacted at 800-428-5306, or www.fitnessfloors.com



DuraFlex is an example of the latest in molded flooring tiles that utilize recycled rubber tires



The new bamboo flooring

COULD WE REPLACE OUR FLOOR FOR FREE?

Maybe not...but it is certain that you can get it done very cheaply with the help of grants that target the use of sustainable products by not-for-profit organizations on both the state and national levels.

The Kresge Foundation

This organization has two separate grants available for not-for-profits. The Green Building Initiative awards planning grants of up to \$100,000 for the planning of renovation using green products, or new building that is designed to achieve Platinum LEED Certification. While that grant only applies to the design phase, the Foundation's Challenge Grant Program provides actual funding for brick and mortar projects for not-for-profits to build or renovate their facilities. While this grant program is more broad based, green building is one of the more important considerations in the awards determination.

Visit their website at <http://www.kresge.org> to apply for these grants.

STATE GRANTS

At least 25 states have programs in which they give grants to not-for-profits for installing products that reduce tire landfill waste. The manufacturer of the product has to show that the material that they utilize actually reduced landfill waste in your state, but this is typically not hard for them to do. Since many rubber floors are made of recycled tires, they qualify for this type of grant, as do outdoor play areas that utilized shredded or rubber tiles under equipment. Many states also provide Green Building grants. Check with the recycling agencies within your state or even local governments.