

Surface Preparation

Surface Preparation is the unseen yet most essential element of any project to ensure the integrity, adhesion and durability of the final floor finish. 30 years ago shotblasting revolutionized how surfaces were prepared by providing a dust free and environmentally method to produce specific surface profiles onto which the final floor finish could then successfully be installed. In simple terms, shotblasting is the process of propelling steel abrasive at high velocity to remove contaminants

There is now a full range of specialist equipment to remove existing surfaces to provide a clean textured finish, or simply to prepare new surfaces for the application of the specified product, or provide the final polished finish on surfaces such as terrazzo.

Whilst the principle of the shotblasting operation has remained unchanged, the equipment used is now more advanced. Product design innovations have realized improved dust extraction with filter technology and reverse air pulsation providing up to 98% dust extraction for dust free operation. Latest designs incorporate more effective re-cycling and separation of debris for improved performance. The added benefit is that this allows the recycling of the steel abrasive (shot) for re-use. Today's equipment offers improved drive and electrical operation, with a higher level of wearability of internal components which has significantly improved machine productivity.

Ride on machines are fully contained and can produce twice the meterage of the walk behind counterparts and are ideal for area such as car parks as no separate power supply is required nor is there the danger of trailing extension cables.

Today, shotblasting remains the most cost effective solution for preparing a wide range of surfaces, in the correct circumstances, i.e.: hard surfaces, material not exceeding 2mm in thickness. The selection of steel abrasive (shot) and the speed at which the machine is propelled determines the degree of profile/cleaning properties.

There are a number of alternatives to shot blasting, ie: Planing, Grinding and Multi-stripping, with specialist equipment to undertake these methods of surface preparation. The selection of which method to use would depend upon the type of surface to be removed and/or its composition, together with the type of profile required for the specified product to be applied.

Shotblasting, planing, grinding, multi-stripping are the surface preparation methods commonly used on highways, industrial and commercial buildings, and shipbuilding.

Despite its key role, the surface preparation industry has had no regulation nor recognition as a specialist skill area. With the key emphasis on safe working practice and professional service within construction and other related industry sectors, it was essential to develop national standards and qualifications. This task was taken on by FeRFA, The Resin Flooring Association, and working with ConstructionSkills and companies involved in this activity (principally The Preparation Group and SPE Group), a National Vocational Qualification has

been developed. In August 2007 an NVQ Level 2 (Prepare and Profile Substrates) was introduced, with two clear routes of entry. Experienced operatives can now be assessed on site by a FeRFA approved assessor to achieve the NVQ Level 2. As with all specialist construction trades, it is imperative to attract newcomers into the industry, and provide them with a structured learning route to achieve a specialist skill. The FeRFA Apprenticeship Scheme for surface preparation meets this requirement. Prior to the introduction of the NVQ, operatives involved in surface preparation were unable to qualify for a CSCS Blue Skilled card.

For more information on surface preparation and training as well as details of companies visit the FeRFA website at www.ferfa.org.uk where you can download a range of useful technical guidance notes, list of members and full details of training offered by FeRFA.

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