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Raised Flooring

When Is It Time To Repair, Replace, Or Resurface?

Plenty of data center elements submit to daily wear and tear, but none takes a more severe beating than raised flooring. Constant traffic, heavy components, and sloppy cleaning procedures contribute the eventual degradation of floor tiles and understructures, but the good news is that today's options for addressing flooring problems are varied and reasonable.

Although it might be tempting to start fresh with a new floor, repair and refurbishing services can easily return your existing floor to like-new status, even if most of your floor is showing its age. Some experts feel that older flooring is more structurally sound than new flooring because of better manufacturing methods seen in years past.

"With the older core product, there have been several manufacturers that have come and gone," explains Bob Boyle. "The reason that they go is that the product keeps getting value engineered to less quality."

According to Boyle, today's new floors weigh 20% less than older floors, and the core of the floor panels never truly wears out. With this in mind, that less-than-attractive floor currently adorning your data center might have more luster than you think.

➡ Getting Use From Used

Determining whether your floor needs attention isn't difficult, but deciding whether to replace, repair, or resurface tiles and understructure can be tricky and depends on a number of factors—some of which are likely out of your hands. Replacing your entire floor is always an option, but because of today's substantial used flooring market, it's not necessarily the best option, either price- or quality-wise.

Unlike most used IT equipment, used flooring can retain its value for spectacular amounts of time, such that panels sitting in a warehouse for 10 years or longer can still create a fine floor for the savvy shopper. The dot-com bust might have left plenty of computer professionals without jobs, but it also left loads of pristine flooring equipment without a home, and that same equipment is now available for sale across the country.

If you think buying used might work for you, it's generally best to leave the analysis to a flooring expert, who can tell you whether it's better to replace certain sections of your floor or the entire floor. Raised flooring companies can usually just view high-resolution digital pictures of your current floor and inform you of the best plan of action, or they can come directly to your site for more in-depth analysis. And regardless of the number of panels you need replaced, chances are good there's something out there for your floor.

"What we do is buy a lot of used flooring, and sometimes we leave it in our shop for a while," says Manuel Lopez, "But somebody seven months from now, seven years from now, or 15 years from now will call us to try to match their existing panels. We can match them."

When necessary, Lopez employs the mixing and matching concept to best

accommodate a customer's situation. "Not every single system fits, but some of the old will fit with the new, and some of the new will fit with the old," he says. "Basically what we usually tell our customers is that we have to look at the actual system and the structure it's sitting on and then we can tell [them] what will fit and what won't fit."

Lopez's company sells used replacement tiles and that price includes the necessary understructure. Compare that to new tiles, which will does not include the understructure. However, keep in mind that your floor's understructure isn't as likely to deteriorate as the tiles are; in fact, Lopez says that the understructure is perfect in 99% of the computer rooms that undergo complete tile replacement.

If you choose to go with used flooring, make sure the equipment includes a warranty. Also be sure to ask about all the available equipment because this market includes flooring of nearly every imaginable quality, with prices reflecting that quality. If you have a particular budget in mind, you should have no problem matching your precise budget to flooring that's suitable for your space.

—Relief Through Resurfacing

Used flooring is certainly enticing, but there's another option that delivers similar cost savings with potentially better results. Several raised flooring companies can resurface existing flooring for less than you'd pay for a new floor, all with a turnaround of days or even hours instead of weeks.

"If your core product is still viable, it makes no sense at all to pick it up and throw it away, nor does it make any sense to pick it up and replace it," says Boyle. "We can pick [the tile] up, resurface it, and put it right back where it came from within minutes. You compromise really nothing if you're resurfacing with exactly the same surface that the new product is going to have."

Boyle's company offers a wide selection of finishes, including laminates, stone, wood, carpet, rubber, vinyl, and epoxy, and the company can match existing finishes, change to a new finish, or combine finishes for a unique look. Laminate finishes are available in multiple colors, so you can easily match your existing color or choose a new look if desired.

According to Boyle, about 80% of today's floors can be resurfaced, but certain floors aren't worth the effort. For instance, floors with wood cores, floors that are heavily oxidized, or floors with inferior steel content are not worth the resurfacing investment because they could deteriorate faster than a typical, healthy floor.

—See The Whole Picture

Of course, raised flooring problems aren't limited to just the panels, which is why most flooring companies will also relevel floors, repair trim edges, fix loose railing, and install additional support pedestals if necessary. Again, because some of these problems aren't always apparent to the untrained eye, it's usually best to let an expert inspect your floor to determine the best solution. —

Pick Your Panel

If you're starting over with a new raised floor, you might discover flooring that's more appropriate for your space. Following are several of today's common flooring options.

Wood. High-density particle board enclosed panel with galvanized steel.

Concrete. Lightweight cementitious core usually used in office spaces with carpet squares installed. Most durable option, combining strength of steel with compression of concrete.

Steel. Welded steel panel available with or without cementitious fill.

Aluminum. Expensive specialty flooring generally used in clean rooms and MRI rooms.

Specialty. Plexiglass access floor delivers decorative appeal or visual access to temperature gauges.