

## **UNDERSTANDING TELEGRAPHING IN RESILIENT FLOORING INSTALLATIONS**

### **What Is Telegraphing?**

Telegraphing refers to the visible imprint or outline of surface irregularities beneath resilient flooring materials such as vinyl tile, vinyl sheet, VCT, and similar products. These imperfections in the substrate—whether from textures, irregular substrate, floor preparation, expansion joints, cracks, concrete finish, old flooring, seams, coatings, leftover adhesive, or debris—can become visible through the flooring over time.

This visual distortion is particularly noticeable under backlighting or natural lighting and tends to become even more pronounced on glossy or polished finishes. In contrast, matte-finished flooring is less likely to highlight such surface inconsistencies.

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### **Why Telegraphing Happens**

As resilient flooring conforms to the shape and topography of the substrate, any raised or uneven areas beneath will eventually reflect on the surface. Over time, this conformity becomes permanent, especially with exposure to heat and pressure. For example:

- High-speed buffing or polishing can soften and mold the flooring, accelerating telegraphing.
- Trowel ridges or uneven adhesive application can become embossed into the flooring's underside, particularly with thin or flexible materials.

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### **Preventing Telegraphing During Installation**

To minimize the risk of telegraphing, attention to substrate preparation and adhesive application is critical:

#### **Adhesive Guidelines**

- Apply adhesives in strict accordance with the flooring manufacturer's specifications, including the recommended trowel size, spread rate, and open time.



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- Allow the adhesive to dry to the correct level of tackiness within its designated working time. If it becomes too dry, it may not transfer effectively, leading to poor bond or visible ridges.
- Immediately roll the flooring after installation with a 3-section, 75–100 lb roller to ensure consistent contact, flatten the material, and prevent impressions from setting into the adhesive.

### **Installation Techniques for Thin or Glossy Flooring**

- For thin-gauge or highly polished flooring, a two-step adhesive application may be advisable: first, trowel the adhesive as directed, then back-roll it using a 3/8" nap paint roller. This helps smooth out trowel lines and reduce the chance of ridging.
- Consider substrate porosity and surface texture, as these affect how quickly the adhesive dries. Porous subfloors or low-humidity conditions may cause the adhesive to dry too rapidly, limiting workability.

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### **Substrate Considerations**

- Smooth, non-porous substrates (like sealed concrete or old vinyl) are more prone to telegraphing. In such cases, a lighter adhesive spread or a suitable primer may be recommended to reduce surface tension.
- Any surface debris, old adhesive residues, or uneven coatings should be fully removed before installation to avoid print-through issues.

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### **Key Takeaways**

- Telegraphing is a result of substrate imperfections transferring through resilient flooring.
- Proper adhesive application, surface preparation, and rolling techniques are essential to reduce the risk.
- Flooring material type, environmental conditions, and substrate characteristics all influence whether telegraphing will occur.



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**⚠ Note:**

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