

TECHNICAL INFORMATION SHEET NUMBER 4

September 2013

HOW TO DEAL WITH SLIPPERLY SQUASH COURT FLOORS

1. INTRODUCTION

The floor is one of the two principal playing surfaces in a squash court. To replace a squash court floor is expensive, both in terms of capital investment and lost revenue during the replacement period. It is, therefore, common sense and prudent to maintain and repair floors diligently and regularly. This paper refers to floors laid in maple, beech and MDF panels (painted). Other timber floors such as pine boards or herring bone fashion pine blocks are occasionally found, as are floors in plywood and composition materials are not generally considered suitable for squash court floors.

2. MATERIALS

Maple

If your courts were built before 1939 and have their original floor, the timber will probably be maple in strips up to 75mm wide and between 2000mm and 3000mm long. Courts with these floors should continue to play satisfactorily if properly maintained. It may be difficult, though not impossible, to find strips of similar dimensions for repairs.

Since 1950, maple strips have tended to be narrower (50 – 60mm) and shorter (average 1100mm). Occasionally you find short grained strips, where the grain runs across the width of the strip at the heading joint rather than length ways. These are more likely to split and should be avoided.

Beech

Beech strip flooring is widely used. Beech strips can be easily recognised as they are in double widths and regular lengths. This timber comes in strips of 3700mm long, 129mm wide and 22mm deep.

Painted floor surfaces

The floor paint should provide a non-slip surface to comply with EN14904.2006, under wet and dry conditions.

3. SLIPPERINESS

Slippery floors are probably the most frequent cause for complaint by players. The problem usually arises from one or more of the following conditions, all of which can be overcome

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4. MOISTURE

Visible (sweat) or invisible (condensation) moisture, which settles on the surface of the court floors, rather than being absorbed by the wood and with a small amount of dust from the breakdown of the ball can cause a dangerous loss of traction both to players' footing and the ball. Any moisture on the floors should be urgently investigated, especially if there is any possibility of penetration through the roof, walls or floors. Never spend money on the inside of a court until the external shell has been proved watertight. Remember that the environmental properties of a squash court and the surrounds can materially affect the likelihood of moisture problems. Moisture on the floor is frequently exacerbated by sealed floors (see Sections 5 & 6). It is not intended here to discuss remedies for moisture problems as they are covered in detail in England Squash Technical Information Sheet Number 9, which includes a moisture diagnosis chart.

5. SEALING

England Squash advises that court floors should be UNSEALED to lessen the risk of slipperiness. Historically, floors were sealed because most courts were built detached from club houses and/or were unlikely to be regularly cleaned. Players would, as often as not, walk from the changing rooms to the courts across wet, muddy or dirty car parks in their playing shoes, thus transporting undesirable material onto the court.

Any sealant reduces porosity (the ability to absorb moisture rather than allowing it to gather on the surface) of timber; thus a sealed floor is inherently more prone to slipperiness than an unsealed one when affected by sweat or condensation.

Floor treatment should only be carried out by a flooring contractor who has the correct type of equipment and who has proven experience and competence in treating squash court floors.

6. TO SEAL OR NOT TO SEAL

IF THE FLOORS ARE NOT SEALED

- Greater ability to absorb moisture
- Reduction in risk of slipperiness
- Provision of lighter coloured surfaces
- Preferred by competitive players

IF FLOORS ARE SEALED

- Better ability to repel stains
- In certain circumstances it may be considered preferable to apply a sealant eg. where access from changing rooms to courts requires an out of door transit resulting in dirt/grit being carried into the court area.

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If it is decided to seal, there are important steps to take:

- Never seal an already sealed floor without sanding first
- Sand to clean white wood leaving a slight surface nap (60 grade grit has been found to be suitable)
- Leave no traces of paint, stain or dirt
- Clean the floor thoroughly, taking off all dust and dirt
- Check for raised nail heads, split boards and exposed tongues and grooves.
- Seal the floor with one coat only of a clear floor sealant (5-7 litres per court)
- Paint red floor lines (tape is not recommended)

7. DUST

Accumulated dust and dirt on the floor can lead to slippery condition. Regular cleaning of squash court floors is necessary to avoid this.

A Vee mop with a cotton/synthetic head on a wire frame with a flexible head pushed across the floor will create static which attracts the butyl-rubber dust from the floor, this method will be found to be more effective than sweeping with a soft broom.

In severe cases where dust has been allowed to build up, an industrial pattern vacuum cleaner should be used.

If there is a persistent problem with dust, a slightly damp towel will remove the majority of dust from the floor. The towel must not be made so wet that it leaves traces of moisture on the floor. It is also important to clean regularly the adjacent areas such as the galleries, lobbies and corridors. It is advisable to supply mats immediately outside the court doors, which will help prevent dust and dirt being carried or blown onto the court.

8. SANDING

The floor is sanded by running the sanding machine along the length of the court. The surface should be left with a slight 'nap'.

9. PAINTED OR STAINED SURFACES

If it is decided to have an existing or new floor painted or stained, materials used should provide a non-slip surface which will comply with EN14904-2006, under both wet and dry conditions.

Please note that the information for the maintenance and provision of squash courts contained in the England Squash Technical Information Sheets apply to courts built in the United Kingdom only.