

CARPET WITH ATTACHED CUSHION

By Tom Cartmell

It would be difficult to name each ATTACHED-CUSHION product and show a photograph of each because most carpet manufacturer's private label the backing. In other words, you may see the same cushion attached to three different manufacturer's products, not using the same name even though it is the same ATTACHED CUSHION. I'm sure a few nerves will shake with this article, but I write these articles to help carpet installers avoid some of the problems that I see in the field every day.

If in doing that I hit a nerve here and there, so be it. If you are one of those who start to get a twitch in your neck when reading this article, please remember this is definitely not personal. It is not the end of the world. It is just one man's opinion based on his experience with these products. It is not what someone else told him or what he might have heard, but his own actual experience with ATTACHED CUSHION products.

In keeping up with the carpet industry, you are aware that the backing is becoming almost as important as the face of the carpet. Every time you turn around someone is coming out with a new "backing system." The Manufacturers, who haven't yet, will probably be doing so soon. The reason for this is simple. Today, the Consumer is looking for something different and an added value for their purchase. They want the comfort of a cushion. They like the idea that a carpet backing is available that will not scratch their walls and furniture. Their eyes light up when you tell them that they no longer need to worry about restretching this product. Today, office buildings are receiving the comfort of cushion in a direct-glue installation. The customer no longer must be concerned with restretching. This is a big plus when you consider the office systems that have to be dismantled to properly restretch carpet.

We are seeing many different ATTACHED CUSHION products on the market, so don't fall into that "ATTACHED CUSHION IS ATTACHED CUSHION" trap. I am still fighting "CARPET IS CARPET" throughout the country. Most of the ATTACHED CUSHION products are made of urethane and extenders or fillers. The extenders are used to control the density.

Another big factor is the "pre-coat" used to apply the ATTACHED CUSHION onto the carpet. The carpet Manufacturer decides what pre-coat will best fit their requirements for a specific product. Then the carpet is normally sent to an outside source for the backing application. The pre-coat systems of which I am aware are:

- 1) Latex pre-coat
- 2) Urethane pre-coat
- 3) EVA pre-coat (ethylene vinyl acetate)

The EVA pre-coat has a lot to do with the pliability of the carpet. Some of the different urethane products available are prime urethane, some condensed urethane products, some with felt scrims on the back of the cushion and some with high-pick woven secondary backs added to the cushion. Some of the ATTACHED CUSHIONS have a very smooth and soft urethane back. I can assure you there are more to come and you will be surprised when you learn how they are constructed.

Though many of these products are very different, they do have some of the same qualities, such as they are all HEAVY! To the Manufacturer, this means little, other than it cost more to ship it. Of course, that is built into the cost of the carpet. But for the Installer, it's only the beginning. You must staff a project with ATTACHED CUSHION CARPET accordingly. It requires more manpower and

equipment to install the carpeting properly. It takes more labor just to fold the carpet back to prepare for spreading the adhesive. Depending on the construction of the carpet, it may take longer to seam.

For example: I'll make it easy. Let's talk about a solid-color, woven cut-and-loop carpet with a pattern design. The basic seaming procedure for an ATTACHED CUSHION is to row cut the seams. This should **always** be your first option. If the carpet is to "snaky" or the "trueness-to-edge" is not straight, most Manufacturers will tell you to trace-cut the seams. That is, to trace-cut one side and then trace-cut the other side to the row-cut side. With a basic loop-pile product, this can be done to achieve an acceptable appearance. However, you still run the risk of fuzzy seams when the carpet is subject to foot traffic, but this example is a woven design product. You can't trace cut the seams, they must be row-cut.

So, we as Installers must attempt to make pressure seams. All gaps must be closed in the seams creating overlapped areas. It becomes necessary to push the excess carpet away from the seam area and out of the area that has been glued. With some of the above-mentioned products, this cannot be done. It is not flexible enough to push the excess carpet away from the seam. The entire breath of carpet will move first.

Another option is to bump the seams together and attempt to close the gaps in the seams using crabs; powerstretchers and several "deadmen." With some products, such as the condensed urethanes, which are very stiff, this will not work. The carpet is not flexible enough. Some of the more pliable products can be stretched in order to close the gaps in the seams. However, I have seen the carpet ease back after a few days, which is partially due to the soft adhesives we are using today. The characteristic of some adhesives is to obtain "legs" long after the curing period. This allows a carpet that has been stretched that has a memory to return to its original position, obviously creating gaps in the seams.

The point is an ATTACHED CUSHION product may become very costly for the Installer who is not prepared or experienced with installing ATTACHED CUSHIONS. I have read articles where people were quoted as saying, "That installing a PATTERNED ATTACHED CUSHION product is no different than installing a synthetic secondary-backed product." I am going to be kind today and just use half of my vocabulary and say "BULL!" Either the gentleman has never installed a PATTERNED ATTACHED CUSHION lately, or he has restricted his efforts to a 12x12 room that could be installed easily even if it has plywood with fuzz on it.

The fact is that installing a patterned carpet is a challenge. It is expensive for the Installer. Installing ATTACHED CUSHION is challenging and definitely costs the Installer more to install. Let's not forget to add bowing, skewing and pattern elongation. Now, with a little common sense, one realizes that when you put the two together, it is going to take more time, more manpower, more equipment, more skill and knowledge to properly install these products. REMEMBER, a pattern match may NOT always be achievable!

Please don't misunderstand my intentions here. I am not against ATTACHED CUSHION products. In fact, I like them. However, I do believe as an industry we need to be a little more honest with ourselves, as well as the Customer. We need to use a little more wisdom when deciding what type of carpet must suits the ATTACHED CUSHION.

As for the Installers, do not continue an installation where you can plainly see it will not be accepted by the Customer. As a qualified person examining an installation, you will know very quickly that you are in over your head and you will know how and when you got into trouble. Please stop the installation, get help. Continue the installation ONLY when you are confident that your installation will be accepted by the end user. There is no shame in doing whatever it takes to ensure a quality installation. None of us are expected to be perfect, but we, as a Team can get pretty close!