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Commercial Building Stair Safety:

MORE EFFECTIVELY **PREVENTING** *Slips and Falls* on High Traffic Stairs

By Bob Finkenaur

Independent retail lumber dealers sell to builders, contractors, architects, and consumers who depend on safe, reliable footing on any stairs located both inside and outside a structure or facility.

However, in commercial buildings across the country, the most common technique for preventing slip-and-fall accidents on stairs—the application of non-skid adhesive tapes or epoxy coatings embedded with aggregate—is often neither foolproof nor reliable. On high-traffic stairways, tapes can peel off (creating a trip hazard) and coatings abrade away quickly, leading to frequent reapplication every few months to maintain safety standards.

Now, a new category of durable high-tech epoxy is available as a solution to effectively ensure superior stair tread footing, safety, and visibility for years without re-application. This option dramatically reduces the need for maintenance and replacement even in heavily traveled areas and can be quickly and easily applied on stair treads by maintenance personnel.



The Slip-and-Fall Epidemic

Slip-and-fall incidents are a leading cause of injury and a factor in many lawsuits and workers' compensation claims. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), "in general, falls and slips are responsible for 15% of all accidental deaths, the second-leading cause after motor vehicles, and account for 25% of all reported injury claims."

"It is very important to improve stair safety in high-traffic commercial buildings, particularly in New York State," says Gani Bajraktari, senior property manager at New York-based Bajraktari Realty Management Corp. "In [New York] state, the property owner is presumed responsible if anyone gets hurt on a property. So, a little bit of prevention goes a long way."

To dramatically improve building safety, enhancing the traction, feel, and visibility of stair treads is the most effective means of reducing slip-and-fall incidents and injuries.

A Long-Term Safety Solution

Enhancing the traction of stair treads to improve safety is not a new concept. However, most options on the market are decidedly low-tech, such as applying non-skid adhesive tape or a coating with embedded aggregate to each tread.

Another solution for many commercial buildings is applying a non-skid tape embedded with aggregate. However, if the adhesive does not adhere well to the surface, it can peel off and become a trip hazard within a few months. The aggregate in the tape is only lightly embedded on the surface as well, and in high-traffic areas, it can quickly wear away.

"In my experience, non-skid tape comes off repeatedly. It is a temporary solution, so you are wasting your time, energy, and effort every time you reapply it," says Bajraktari.

Fortunately, Bajraktari discovered a more durable epoxy paste consisting of 100% solids that, once applied, can last for years in high-traffic areas. The product provides an extremely strong bond to a range of stair tread surfaces, with embedded aggregate to increase traction.

The product, available in black and safety yellow, delineates the edge of each stair tread. The epoxy paste can be used indoors or outdoors and exposed to chemicals, weather, and temperature extremes. The bond is so strong that a chisel or angle grinder is required to remove the stair tread line, an advantage in high-traffic areas.

According to Bajraktari, he first used the epoxy paste to improve the safety and footing of outdoor stairs in residential projects that could become slippery when wet. "It held up amazingly well to the sun's UV and outdoor weather. Seven years later, it still looks as good as the day we applied it."

To resolve an issue with broken vinyl treads at his commercial property, he removed all the treads, sanded the underlying concrete, and applied the product. The new treads improved safety and minimized the possibility of slip-and-fall incidents as well as potential liability.

"Instead of temporary applications, it is much more effective to solve the problem the first time with a product and be done with it. The footing is amazing, and you feel more secure going up and down the stairs," says Bajraktari.

He adds, "As far as durability, I expect the stair treads to last for at least 10 years or more in indoor applications."


The high-strength epoxy paste is designed for easy application to stair treads by even untrained personnel. In a kit, a 400-ml cartridge of material can produce 25 to 40 linear feet of 1-inch-wide tread. A special tool is then used to dispense and mix the material at the time of application in the correct ratio, eliminating the risk of human error.

The kit includes a patent-pending stencil system, so the 1-inch-wide tread lines remain clean, neat, and parallel. In addition to straight-line treads, instructions such as "Exit Here" or a corporate logo can be applied using the material and a stencil. "The kit provides everything you need. Just follow the instructions, and basically anyone can improve stair safety," says Bajraktari.

For added safety, the 100% epoxy tread line does not shrink, providing a superior tactile sensation that creates greater awareness of footing when climbing or descending stairs.

According to Bajraktari, the epoxy product not only improved safety and eliminated the need for frequent re-application but also had a more aesthetic look over time due to the lack of visible wear.

"The insurance company will undoubtedly raise its rates to cover its costs," says Bajraktari. He has found the approach surprisingly cost-effective in reducing maintenance, potential liability, and commercial insurance rates.

Commercial property managers have long sought to improve facility safety, but traditional methods of adding traction and visibility to stair treads are short lived and high maintenance. With advanced durable all-solid epoxy pastes that adhere to stair treads for years, managers now have an easy tool to improve long-term safety. 

About the author: Bob Finkenaur is the owner of the Form-A-Tread Company (www.form-a-tread.com), a division of RGF Materials Company LLC, founded in 2015, certified by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) as a VOSB (Veteran Owned Small Business) with years of experience providing high-value formulated products and solutions to a wide variety of professional and consumer markets.