

## Recycling at Ground-Level

### **Bürofloor bt70 carpet tile takes use of recycled materials to a new level**

Recycling bins have become a part of our daily life. Many of us regard them as a nuisance and resent the extra time we now have to put into sorting our rubbish. That's hardly surprising when we read of council's taking the separated recyclable waste and dumping it in landfill sites. So it's reassuring to see that at least some of what we throw away is being put to good use. If you're in an office, look down – what's under your feet may have started life as a plastic bottle.

Nylon is usually regarded as the material of choice for commercial carpet tiles. But nylon comes from fossil fuels, of which we have a finite resource.

It's for this reason that commercial carpet tile specialist Bürofloor has introduced a new "green" product to its range of carpet tiles for office environments. It's based on Econyl70, a carpet fibre developed by yarn manufacturer Aquafil.

"For a product to be truly 'green', its manufacturing process needs to be ecologically sound, and all of the materials need to be based on a recycling philosophy," said Simon Lawrence, Bürofloor's Managing Director. "Econyl70 contains a minimum of 70% recycled content, which is a good start considering that the pile is such a major component of the carpet tile. But using an eco-friendly pile material isn't enough to make an ecologically sustainable product."

Carpet Tiles are made from looped or tufted pile, bonded to a composite backing which usually consists of a primary and secondary component. Lawrence maintains that the backing should be viewed with the same significance as the pile. "If we want to do more than pay lip-service to recycling then we have to consider *all* of the materials used in its manufacture, as well as the manufacturing process itself and the support systems that surround it. "

With all this in mind Bürofloor has launched its bt70 carpet tile. "Using Econyl70 as a benchmark we've set the bar at a minimum of 70% recycled material in the overall tile, not just the pile. But that's just a starting point, so bt70 just stands for Better Than 70 – we're out to beat our own benchmark."

The primary backing is made from 100% post-consumer recycled material, most of which comes from polyester bottle scrap. But this has to be transported to the factory, so to cut fuel wastage the recycled material is gathered from sources local to manufacture.

Secondary backing has proved a problem for recyclers in the past – the required characteristics for this essential layer haven't been available without using new raw materials. "In fairness, this is still a problem," admits Lawrence, "But it is possible to reduce the environmental load by in-process recycling."

The process that manufactures bt70 tiles uses the cutting waste to make the secondary backing, giving this component a 10% post-industrial recycled content. So overall the carpet tile is made from 10% recycled secondary backing, 100% recycled primary backing, and 70% recycled pile material. At the time of this article (December 2008), this is the highest level of recycled material available in the carpet tile marketplace.

“It doesn’t stop there,” Lawrence predicts, “The pile has a guaranteed **minimum** recycled content of 70%; that percentage is being increased constantly as research progresses and processes improve. The carpet tile has to be colour-fast, durable and stable, otherwise it doesn’t do its job, and no one will accept inferior performance, however green a product may be. Research and testing is continuing in order to increase the level of reclaimed material that can be used, particularly in the area of the secondary backing.”

An application is in place for certification under BREEAM (British Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method). This is expected to be granted in the first quarter of 2009, giving the product a recognised standard certificate to prove it ticks the necessary environmental boxes.

“Businesses nowadays have to be able to demonstrate ecologically sound purchase decisions, as well as cleaning up their act in manufacturing processes.” says Simon Lawrence, “We’re seeing a growing – and encouraging – trend among commercial buyers to request details of the ecological footprint of the products they buy from their suppliers. With bt70 we’re establishing a line in the sand that gives them the answers they need, and we’re giving ourselves a baseline from which to do better. Better Than 70 is just a starting point.”