

Validation Dates for Suitability Reports

This article explains why ASET Services considers suitability reports valid for only 7 years. Reasons range from changes in the definitions of grading rules to changes to the components of items used within the sports surface system. Changes in the raw materials of wood based systems and in the formulations of various components of synthetic materials may result in changes in performance.

ASET Services started including 'valid through' dates on all suitability reports in the summer of 2003. ASET Services chose to make suitability reports valid for a period of seven years. The sections that follow will address some of the reasons why a validation date is needed on suitability reports, and the criteria used to establish a validity period for suitability reports.

1. Changes in Grading Rules

The quality of raw materials used to construct sports surfaces is constantly changing. While the names of various material grades often go unchanged, the definitions of grading rules names are often changed to reflect the quality of the raw materials used during production.

An example of this is the MFMA (Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association) grade rules for random length tongue and groove strip flooring. Sometime between 1997 and 2001, the MFMA slightly modified it's definitions for random length strip flooring.

For the purpose of brevity this article will examine the amount of short material allowed in nested bundles in 1997^[a] and 2001^[b].

| % Less than 15" (1997) | % Less than 18" (2001) |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 8 | 10 |
| 12 | 15 |
| 40 | 42 |

The changes in this table appear to be minimal, but these reflect only a portion of the changes made throughout the new grading rules. It is impossible to accurately predict the

effect of similar changes without testing samples constructed with material meeting the new grading rules.

A 'second grade' random length strip maple sports surface system tested prior to this grading rule change could have a measurably different performance than 'second grade' random length strip maple sports surface system tested after the grading rule change, due to changes in the grading rules.

This does not imply that grading rules changes are isolated to the playing surface. Similar environmental and economical pressures exist within the sleeper and subfloor markets. This article has chosen to focus on on such grading rule change for the purposes of illustration.

2. Changes in Materials

Some products within a sports surface system are defined by grading rules based on their appearance (ex. Maple), other products may be defined by grading rules based on their performance (ex: plywood). Plywood and OSB (oriented strand board) panels are an example of products that use performance grading.

Plywood and OSB panels are rated by their structural strength as evaluated through a variety of standardized tests^[c]. However, the raw material properties of these products are a function of not only the wood materials but also the glue compounds used. As an example a manufacturer might be able to offset any strength decreases due to the quality of the wood raw materials through changes in the structural properties of the glue.

Similarly, a synthetic material could be under pressure to reduce certain chemicals or com-

pounds. Today, Mercury is an example of an element facing this type of environmental pressure. Reducing or eliminating an offending component in a synthetic system may require the addition of new components in order to maintain flexibility and strength values considered key by the manufacturer.

Evaluating the structural properties of products is a key tool for manufacturers. The tests are often simple, effective and relatively inexpensive. However, the fact that a product's performance remains unchanged under simple test settings does not necessarily indicate that the sports related performance will not change in the finished sports surface, of which that product is only a component.

3. Process Changes

Simple changes in the manufacturing or installation processes may also result in small changes to the performance of the sports surface system.

- Example: A strip flooring producer makes a change in the manufacturing process or equipment to reduce production costs. A side effect of this change could be tighter or looser fits between the tongue and groove and this could change the performance of the system.

4. Duration of Certificate/Performance Validity

Much thought was given to selecting a duration for the validity dates of performance certificates issued by ASET Services. The two key factors that were considered during this process were:

- Ensuring purchasers of new sports floors that the performance values were up to date
- Selecting a duration that did not place undue financial burdens on manufacturers that would have to be passed on to customers

After considering the issue for some time, it was concluded that a validity duration of seven years should provide adequate protection to purchasers and adequate value to manufacturers. Customers can be secure in knowing that the performance levels in the

suitability certificates, or report, issued by ASET Services are relevant to the performance of their newly purchased floor. Likewise, manufacturers have seven years to decide if the performance of a sports surface should be re-evaluated to keep a current suitability report.

5. References

[a]1997: Maple Grading Rules of the MFMA (Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association)

[b]2001: Maple Grading Rules of the MFMA (Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association)

[c]1997: Plywood Design Specifications, APA, The Engineered Wood Association.

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