

The industry's leading tile installation magazine

NOVEMBER 2026

TileLetter

THE
SAFETY
ISSUE

THE STORY UNDER THE TILE

AT THE ONTARIO TOWER BUZZERS
MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL STADIUM

WORKING
SMARTER:
PPE HABITS THAT PROTECT
TILE AND STONE PROS FOR
THE LONG HAUL

Commitment, craftsmanship,
continuous improvement,
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HELP KEEP ISLAND INSTALLER AFLOAT

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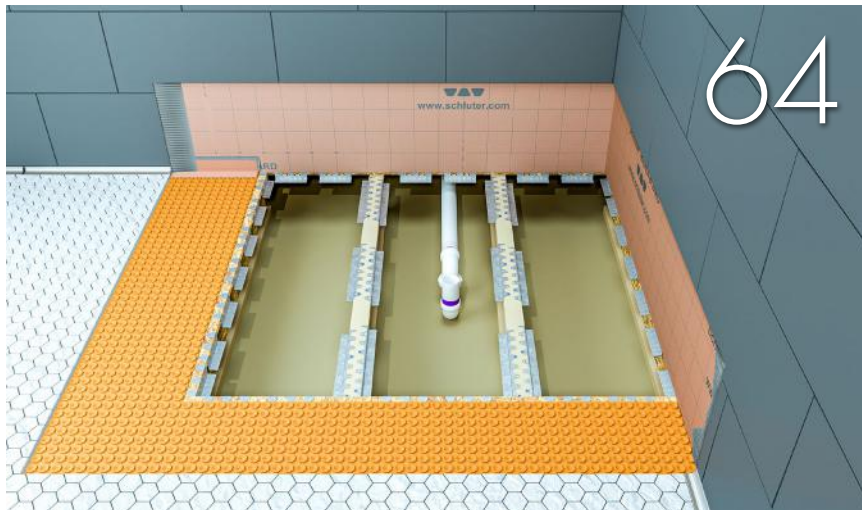
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TileLetter

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2026 NTCA Workshop Programs*

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NOVEMBER

- 3 **Floor & Decor** – Buford, GA
- 3 **Floor & Decor** – Cumming, GA
- 4 **MSI** – Austell, GA
- 5 **Daltile** – West Columbia, SC
- 5 **The Tile Shop** – Tampa, FL
- 10 **Daltile** – Duluth, GA
- 10 **Daltile** – Fresno, CA
- 10 **Floor & Decor** – Madison, AL
- 10 **Arizona Tile** – Anaheim, CA
- 11 **Daltile** – Anaheim, CA

- 11 **Daltile** – Bakersfield, CA
- 12 **Floor & Decor** – Chula Vista, CA
- 12 **James Hardie** – Los Angeles, CA
- 17 **Daltile** – Sacramento, CA
- 17 **Floor & Decor** – Brentwood, TN
- 18 **Emser Tile** – San Jose, CA
- 19 **Daltile** – Salinas, CA

DECEMBER

- 1 **MSI** – La Vergne, TN
- 1 **Hamilton Parker** – Cincinnati, OH
- 2 **Daltile** – Huntsville, AL
- 2 **Hamilton Parker** – Columbus, OH
- 3 **Daltile** – Chattanooga, TN
- 3 **Hamilton Parker** – Brooklyn Heights, OH
- 8 **Floor & Decor** – St. Petersburg, FL
- 9 **MSI** – Orlando, FL
- 10 **Floor & Decor** – Jacksonville, FL
- 31 **Daltile** – Cranberry Township, PA

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- 19 **BPI** – Huntsville, AL
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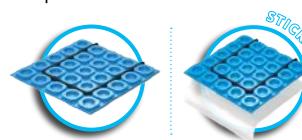


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Lesley Goddin

"Joy is the simplest form of gratitude."

— KARL BARTH

Welcome to November, the portal to the winter holidays. It's fitting we celebrate Thanksgiving this month, with gratitude for the year behind us and anticipation of the year to come.

This November, I want to share a word of gratitude for Rod Owen as he ends his two-year term as NTCA President. His wisdom, dedication, and guidance have helped shape NTCA's direction for the past two years. He'll take a new role as Chairman of the Board. I'm also grateful for Woody Sanders as he steps into the position of NTCA president. Woody is a font of knowledge, enthusiasm, professionalism, and organization. I look forward to what he will bring to the NTCA presidency.

Our *TileLetter* theme this month is Safety, with information about safe practices woven throughout our content.

In our Business section, Neil Schmitz of Midwest Industrial Resource Group details how to avoid administrative blind spots in the face of OSHA's Crystalline Silica National Emphasis Program (NEP) and its compliance requirements. Additionally, Cam Mackey of the International Safety Equipment Association addresses the hazards posed by dust and how to protect your eyes, ears, knees, hands, and feet. And NTCA Executive Director Bart Bettiga's One-to-One interview this month is with Brad Yeubanks of World Insurance, who reviews

important components of a safety program and how it impacts the tile trade.

In our Technical section, CTEF's Scott Carothers lists a range of hazards to safeguard against, and he includes practices that are employed during CTEF training and certification testing. Even this month's Mindset Matters blurb addresses safety: both on the job and amidst your thoughts and emotions, as well as the responsibility of leaders to create a workplace culture where workers feel safe to share ideas and are valued.

In this issue, also meet Monique DePonte, who with her husband, Wallace, runs Ocean Tile, LLC in Waimea, Hawai'i, and will join the NTCA Board of Directors this month. And our cover story details how materials from CUSTOM Building Products helped the construction of a new 6,000-seat home stadium for the Los Angeles Dodgers' Single-A affiliate, the Ontario Tower Buzzers.

I hope you can welcome this season with a thankful heart and a circle of friends, loved ones, clients, and colleagues who share your sense of gratitude and joy. God bless,

Lesley
lesley@tile-assn.com

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Rod Owen

ONE LAST TIME

As I sit down to write this month's President's Letter, it feels a little different. After two years serving as President of the National Tile Contractors Association, this will be my final letter in this role.

Over these past two years, I've had the privilege of sharing a few thoughts with you each month. My goal was never to tell you how to run your business or suggest that I have all the answers. My hope was to get you thinking about your business, your people, your leadership, and what you could do to become better personally and professionally.

During my term, our Ten Essential Business Acumen Skills for Successful Business Leaders series was an extension of that goal. We talked about Financial, Market, Technological, Leadership, Strategic, Negotiation, Risk Management, Problem-Solving, People Management, and Ethical Acumen. I didn't share those 10 skills simply to fill pages. I shared them because I believe each one can make us better leaders when we intentionally put them into practice.

If even one of these letters caused you to stop and think, try something different, invest in your people, or look at your business from a different perspective, then I consider the time spent writing them worthwhile.

This month's *TileLetter* theme is Safety, and I couldn't think of a more appropriate topic for my final letter. Safety is about protecting people. And isn't that what leadership is really about?

Safety means proper training, procedures, equipment, and jobsite awareness. It also means creating an environment where people know they matter and feel comfortable speaking up when something doesn't look right. Getting the job done should never become more important than getting everyone home safely.

As I hand over the gavel, I couldn't be more confident about the person stepping into this role. Woody Sanders is not only a dear friend, but a peer and leader I respect tremendously. He is someone I continue to learn from, and that is exactly the kind of person I've encouraged all of you to surround yourselves with.

Find people who challenge you. Find people who know things you don't. Find people who will tell you the truth when you don't necessarily want to hear it. Then learn from them.

Woody is one of those people for me, and I know he will bring his own perspective, experience, and leadership to the presidency. I look forward to supporting him and watching him lead NTCA into its next chapter.

As for me, I'm leaving the President's chair, but I'm certainly not leaving NTCA. This association has given me friendships, knowledge, opportunities, and experiences that have helped shape who I am today. I intend to continue giving back to that industry that has given so much to me.

Thank you for allowing me to serve you, for reading my letters, for being part of an industry I am proud to call home.

Keep learning. Keep growing. Keep getting involved. And most importantly, take care of your people.

As always,
Educate for Excellence.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Rod".

Rod Owen
NTCA President
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THE SILICA NEP EXECUTION GAP: BULLETPROOFING THE TILE JOBSITE

A compliant Written Exposure Control Plan (WECP), like the one pictured, must be physically present and actively managed on the jobsite.

By Neil Schmitz, CEO and Independent Safety Director, Midwest Industrial Resource Group



Federal OSHA's Crystalline Silica National Emphasis Program (NEP) is driving rigorous enforcement across the trades. For tile contractors operating on active jobsites, managing respirable crystalline silica is no longer an afterthought—it is a frontline operational requirement.

When your crews are cutting, grinding, or scoring porcelain, ceramic, or stone tile, they generate microscopic respirable dust. In addition to the health threat your crews face from the physical dust, your operation also must grapple with a serious threat from the administrative execution gap: the disconnect between field reality and your company's safety documentation.

Failing to bridge this gap exposes your business to avoidable compliance penalties. Inspectors are looking for strict adherence to the standard. Here is the tactical blueprint to align your operations with OSHA requirements and protect your tile contracting business.

The administrative blind spots on the jobsite

When an OSHA compliance officer reviews your operations, they evaluate your exposure controls against the Permissible Exposure Limit (PEL) of 50 micrograms per cubic meter of air (50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) and an Action Level (AL) of 25 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

For tile contractors, safety failures often stem from generic paperwork that does not reflect actual field conditions. Key administrative requirements include:

- **Accurate written exposure control plans (WECPs):** OSHA requires a written plan that accurately addresses your company's specific tasks and engineering controls. While it does not require drafting a completely new plan for every single project, your documentation must accurately reflect the specific tasks and equipment your crews use on active jobsites.
- **Designated competent person:** You must designate a competent person on-site who is capable of identifying existing and foreseeable silica hazards and has the authorization to take prompt corrective measures.
- **Proper housekeeping:** Housekeeping practices must be managed carefully. Dry sweeping or compressed air is

prohibited unless feasible alternatives are not possible, and practices must be structured to prevent contributing to employee silica exposure.

Controlling exposure: OSHA's Table 1 and assessment realities

Your primary defense on the jobsite is compliance with OSHA's Table 1 (29 CFR 1926.1153), which matches specific tools—such as tile saws and grinders—with required engineering controls, such as integrated water delivery systems or shroud-enclosed vacuums.

- **Table 1 adherence:** If you are fully and properly implementing Table 1, you are not required to conduct independent baseline air monitoring.
- **Alternative exposure assessments:** If you deviate from Table 1 controls, OSHA requires you to perform an exposure assessment to evaluate employee exposure levels using objective data or air monitoring. While utilizing an independent third-party industrial hygienist is an elite best practice for litigation defense and liability reduction, OSHA's baseline standard allows employers flexibility in how those assessments are conducted.

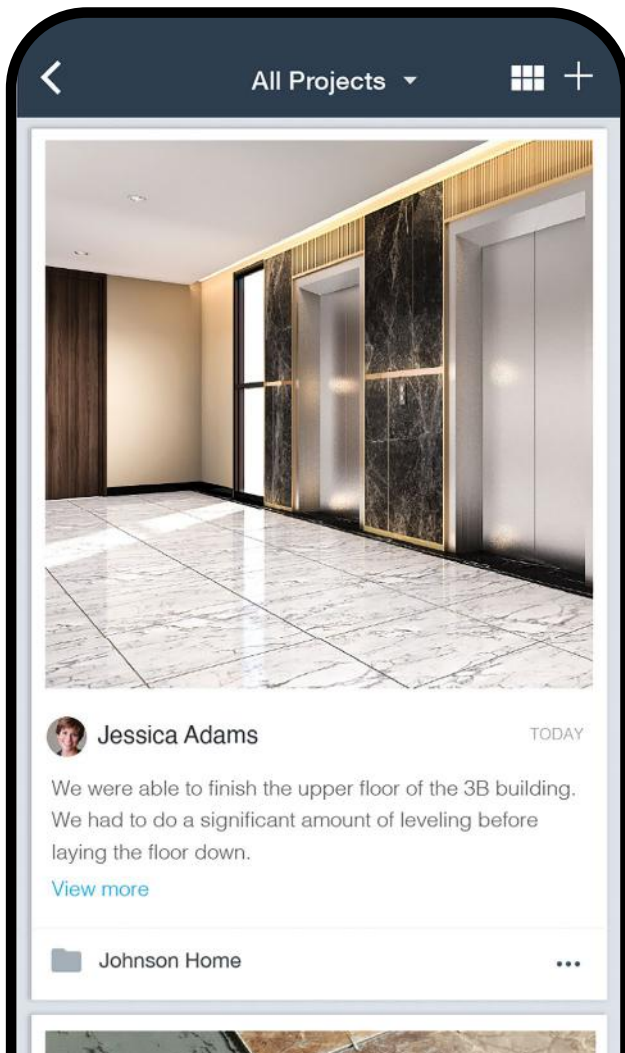
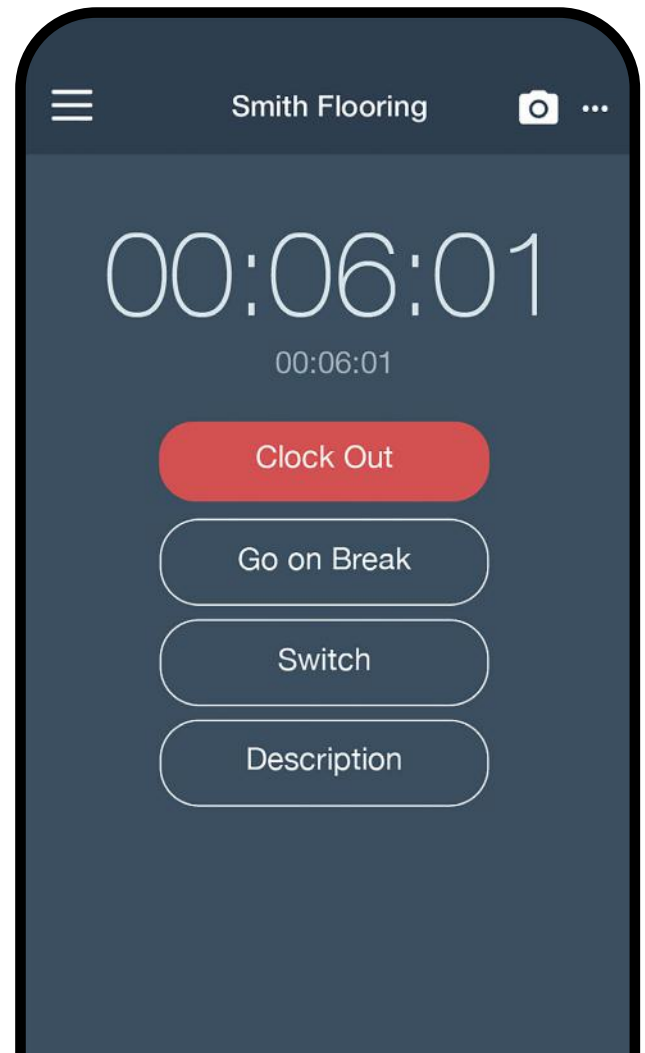
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Managing the medical surveillance trigger

A heavily-scrutinized area during silica audits is medical surveillance. This is a rigid requirement tied directly to respirator usage in the field.

- **The 30-day trigger:** If an employee is required by the standard to wear a respirator for 30 or more days out of a rolling 365-day calendar year, they must be enrolled in a medical surveillance program.
- **The baseline examination:** When the 30-day threshold is met, the employer must provide a medical examination—including a chest X-ray interpreted by a NIOSH-certified B-reader and pulmonary function tests—within the timelines mandated by the standard.

Understanding the regulatory landscape

It is vital to view the current NEP in its proper historical context. OSHA originally issued a Crystalline Silica NEP back in 2008, which was subsequently cancelled in 2017 following the adoption of the updated 2016 silica standards.

The current Respirable Crystalline Silica NEP was issued in 2020. It establishes inspection procedures for enforcing the existing 2016 standards rather than creating new employer mandates. Knowing this history helps contractors understand that enforcement is focused on executing established rules, not moving goalposts.

The executive verdict

Compliance is not about paperwork theater; it is about protecting the health of your workforce and saving your business from catastrophic fines. By maintaining an accurate WECF, strictly utilizing task-specific engineering controls like HEPA-equipped vacuums or water feeds where required, and tracking respirator days, you turn your safety program into an operational shield. **TL**

Neil Schmitz is a 33-year stone and hard-surface industry veteran, CEO, and Independent Safety Director of Midwest Industrial Resource Group (MIRG). Operating strictly as a fully mobile consultant, he specializes in stone fabrication compliance and Expert Witness Services, protecting fabrication shops and tile contractors from regulatory penalties through exact, mechanical risk mitigation. To bulletproof your operation, call or text him directly at 612-290-8769 or email neil@midwestindustrialresource.com.



Executing Table 1 compliance: The operator is equipped with proper PPE (safety glasses and hearing protection) while utilizing the primary engineering control.



Suppressing the hazard: A continuous-flow wet tile saw effectively suppresses respirable crystalline silica dust at the point of operation.

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WORKING SMARTER:

PPE HABITS THAT PROTECT TILE AND STONE PROS FOR THE LONG HAUL

Wearing the right protective gear for the job is the most important kind of first aid—and may prevent you from ever having to use a first aid kit.

By Cam Mackey, President & CEO,
International Safety Equipment
Association (ISEA)



At the end of a long career, most tile and stone professionals can point to a few little scars that came with the job. The bigger concern isn't the cuts and scrapes—it's the damage that builds over time. That ringing in your ears after years around saws and grinders. The knee that reminds you of every floor you've ever installed. The dust you barely notice while you're working, but feel when coughing later. The close call with a flying chip that happened so fast there wasn't time to react.

These aren't new hazards. They're part of a trade that demands skill, precision, and physical endurance. While techniques, tools, and materials change, one constant remains: protecting yourself is just as important as the finished work.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is often discussed as an OSHA compliance issue. While compliance is important, PPE is really more about the person using it. The goal isn't to just get through the day. It's making sure you can continue doing the work you enjoy years from now, and also have an active and healthy life after you choose to stop working.

Dust: the hazard that stays behind

Dust doesn't generally feel like an urgent issue; a little exposure during a job or cut doesn't seem to matter. But over the years, it adds up, and effects may not appear until much later.

The industry has made real progress in controlling dust through wet-cutting methods, water delivery systems, and vacuum-equipped tools. These solutions help reduce exposure at the source and have become standard practice in the field.

Even with those controls in place, respiratory protection remains an important tool for certain tasks. But the same model can provide very different experiences depending on the worker, fit, comfort, and the work being performed. If it shifts, pinches, or needs constant adjustment, it's hard to keep on for a full workday and likely won't get worn as often as it should, or at all. The best respiratory protection fits well enough to become part of the work rather than become a distraction from it.

The eye hazard you don't see coming

For tile and stone professionals, eye protection is essential on every job. But does it match the task at hand?

Eye injuries happen in an instant. A chip from a grinder or a fragment from cut tile can happen without warning, and

there's usually no time to react once it's airborne. That's why coverage, fit, visibility, and comfort all matter.

A day spent setting tile in a finished space presents different risks than demolition, fabrication, grinding, or dry cutting. Depending on the work, that could mean safety glasses with side protection, goggles for dust or splash, or face protection for flying debris. As the work changes throughout the day, eye and face protection may need to change too.

Like any tool used daily, protective eyewear performs best when it's maintained. Scratched lenses, poor visibility, and uncomfortable frames can turn an important piece of protection into something workers are tempted to remove.

Your hands are part of your craft

Tile and stone work takes both strength and precision.

In a single day, your hands could be moving heavy materials, handling sharp edges, spreading mortar, operating cutting equipment, and finishing detailed work. The same glove that works well for one task may not be right for another.

That's why many installers keep more than one glove option with them. Protection matters, but so does grip, feel, and dexterity. A glove has to help protect your hands without getting in the way of the control the job requires.

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The goal of PPE is to make sure you can work safely and continue doing the work you enjoy years from now, and also have an active and healthy life after you choose to stop working.

Your knees remember every floor

Few trades spend more time on their knees than tile installers.

The physical demands take a toll over years spent working on concrete slabs, bathroom floors, kitchens, patios, and commercial spaces. What starts as soreness at the end of the day can escalate into wear and tear that impacts how long and how comfortably someone can stay in the trade, and their quality of life outside work for decades to come.

That's why knee protection transcends comfort: it helps reduce pressure, improve support, and protect a part of the body that tile professionals rely on.

Knee protection has come a long way, with better comfort, support, and weight distribution than many products offered even a decade ago. But the real test is whether the protection stays comfortable and in place, allowing the worker to move through the day.

The best knee pads or mats aren't necessarily the most expensive or feature-rich. They're the ones that protect without constantly slipping, bunching, or getting in the way on the job.



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Like any kind of protective gear, a helmet that shifts, pinches, or needs constant adjustment will be hard to keep on for a full work day, and likely won't get worn as often as it should, or at all.

Safeguarding the hearing you depend on

Hearing loss is one of the easiest injuries to ignore because it builds quietly and imperceptibly—noise from saws, grinders, then a full day around compressors, fabrication equipment, and jobsite activity. Noise after work from traffic, lawn equipment, concerts, earbuds, or everyday life compounds the situation and adds up over time.

This insidious nature makes hearing loss so dangerous. You start asking someone to repeat what they've said, or ringing in your ears lingers after the tools are shut down, or certain sounds don't seem as sharp as they used to.

Hearing protection isn't just for the loudest day on the job. It's for the repeated exposure that happens day after day, year after year. Safeguarding your hearing means recognizing that small exposures still count, and they can compound over the course of a career.

The foundation starts under your feet

Tile and stone professionals spend much of the day on their feet, lifting, carrying materials, climbing, kneeling, and moving across a variety of surfaces.

Good footwear does more than protect against dropped materials, sharp debris, or uneven footing. It helps with balance, stability, comfort, and endurance throughout the day.

Foot pain isn't confined to your feet. It can affect how you move and carry weight, how steady you feel, and how focused or tired you are near the end of a long day, which can impact both the quality of your work and your safety. The wear and tear takes a toll over time.

Footwear that provides the right support and protection helps workers stay comfortable, stable, and focused from the first cut to the final cleanup.

Protecting the career you've built

Craftsmanship takes years to develop. Every experienced tile setter, installer, and fabricator has invested countless hours mastering techniques, solving problems, and refining skills. PPE plays a role in protecting that investment.

Maintaining your PPE is essential. Just like tools, PPE needs to be checked, serviced, and replaced when it's no longer doing its job properly. Taking a few minutes to inspect PPE before a project begins is no different than inspecting a saw blade or checking a tool battery. It's part of the job.

Building habits around PPE helps reduce risk, protects your body over time, and supports the kind of work you take pride in. Because in the end, the most valuable asset on any jobsite isn't the saw, the grinder, or the truck parked outside: it's the person behind the work. **TL**

A network diagram with various icons connected by lines. The icons include a speech bubble, gears, a smartphone, a laptop, a web browser (www), a mail icon (@), and the number 4. The diagram is split by a diagonal line, with the top half being white and the bottom half being teal.

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THE STORY UNDER THE TILE

AT THE ONTARIO TOWER BUZZERS
MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL STADIUM



Ontario Tower Buzzers Stadium on opening day.



Ontario, Calif., welcomed baseball fans in spring 2026 with the opening of a new 6,000-seat home stadium for the Los Angeles Dodgers' Single-A affiliate, the Ontario Tower Buzzers. With its aviation-themed design, modern amenities, and variety of seating choices, the ballpark is a new setting where fans can enjoy minor league baseball. Every detail of the stadium's design contributes to the game-day experience, but the tile installations many visitors encounter without a second thought required far more effort, planning, and craftsmanship than meets the eye.

Tight schedules, synchronizing multiple trades on-site

Tilden-Coil Constructors, Inc. won the bid for the stadium and began construction on October 28, 2024. With the stadium set to open for the 2026 Minor League Baseball season, the project was working against a tight schedule from the start. Multiple trades worked on the stadium at the same time, which meant construction progressed in several areas at once. That approach allowed the stadium to be completed and turned over to the owners in just over a year.

CTI/NTCA Member to the rescue!

One of the contractors working to meet the turnover deadline was Continental Marble & Tile Company, a Certified Tile Installer (CTI) and NTCA Contractor Member based in Corona, Calif. Having recently celebrated 100 years in business, Continental had the experience and skill needed for a commercial project of this magnitude and complexity.

Their installers set over 27,000 sq. ft. of floor tile and 28,000 sq. ft. of wall tile in 70 areas of the stadium, including concession stands, lounges, suites, bars, restrooms, locker rooms, and even outdoor spaces. The tile choices varied from small 2" x 2" mosaics and standard 6" x 6" quarry tile to higher-end options like glossy 6" x 10" Spanish pieces and large-format 48" x 24" Italian slabs. While the finished tilework draws attention, the long-term



Continental installers measure tile before installation in the Flight Deck VIP Lounge.



The substrate was prepared with RedGard® Waterproofing and Crack Prevention Membrane before tile installation. In a lounge with a full-service bar, waterproofing reduces the risk of moisture intrusion into the tile assembly.

performance of any tile project comes from the entire installation system working together.

In busy sports venues, tile installations must endure heavy foot traffic, food and beverage spills, moisture, and frequent cleaning. To help the tilework withstand these conditions over the lifespan of the stadium, Continental chose a complete prep, set, and grout installation system from CUSTOM Building Products. According to Marc Mercado with Continental, “On a project this size, consistency matters as much as performance. We wanted products our crew already trusted so we could stay focused on installation rather than troubleshooting.” The integrated system of products from CUSTOM also provided Continental with warranty coverage for the complete installation, including labor and tile replacement.

Complete CUSTOM installation system provides reliability

Prep: Continental started by treating the substrates with RedGard® Waterproofing and Crack Prevention Membrane. As its name suggests, the membrane was mainly used as a waterproof barrier in hospitality

areas prone to moisture. In other areas exposed to the elements, it acted as a crack-prevention measure.

When temperatures rise and fall, substrates naturally expand and contract, producing stress that can eventually transfer to the tile. By creating a barrier between the substrate and tile, the membrane helps isolate stress before it affects the finished tile. This extra degree of crack protection is particularly important in a climate such as Southern California’s, where exterior surfaces can experience temperature swings from summer days above 100° to winter nights that are near freezing.

Set: ProLite® Premium Large Format Tile Mortar was the main material used for setting the majority of the tiles. Each bag weighs 30 lbs. but covers the same area as a 50-lb. bag of mortar.

Lead installer Bob Kelley joked that all mortar is heavy, but carrying two bags of ProLite felt about as easy as carrying one 50-lb. bag. The lighter bags helped make transporting mortar around the stadium more manageable—the crew moved materials between 70 work areas over several months of construction.

The Flight Deck VIP Lounge was one of the most



Fresh batches of ProLite® Premium Large Format Tile Mortar were mixed on-site as installation progressed. Its non-sag and non-slump properties made it suitable for most of the tile applications throughout the stadium, including vertical bar tile and large-format floor tile in the lounge.



Precise cuts ensured a clean fit around the lounge's architectural details and helped create its unique floor pattern.

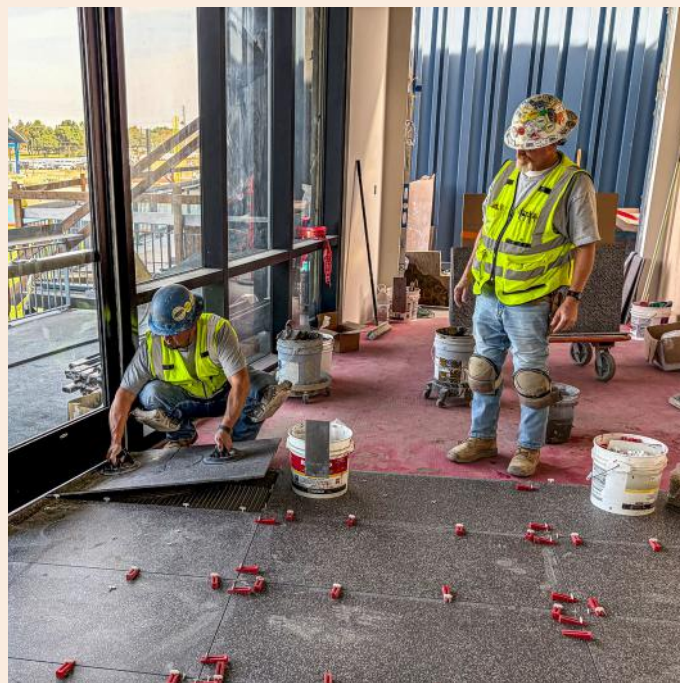
detailed parts of the project. The narrow hallway that tapers toward the doorway, the swirling floor design made with contrasting colors, and the circular bar gave the installers a chance to show off their skills and patience.

"We were doing a lot of cutting in the lounge, so we couldn't just set tile and keep moving," Kelley said. "At one point, we even had to call the door contractor to make sure we had enough clearance. Good thing the mortar didn't start to seize on us while we were cutting. A quick mix, and it was ready to go again."

The layout and main floor design required more precision than the other parts of the project. In the corridor, every third tile had to be cut to fit the taper of the walls and go around the door jamb.

Once they reached the main floor, they measured twice and cut one tile at a time to create the custom curves.

When the intricate floor design was completed, the crew moved on to the circular bar and its center column. The curve of both elements made the installation a bit more challenging. Because the tile had to follow the shape of the bar, installers worked in small sections to keep the joints even as they moved around. Todd Poulsen, another lead installer for Continental, explained,

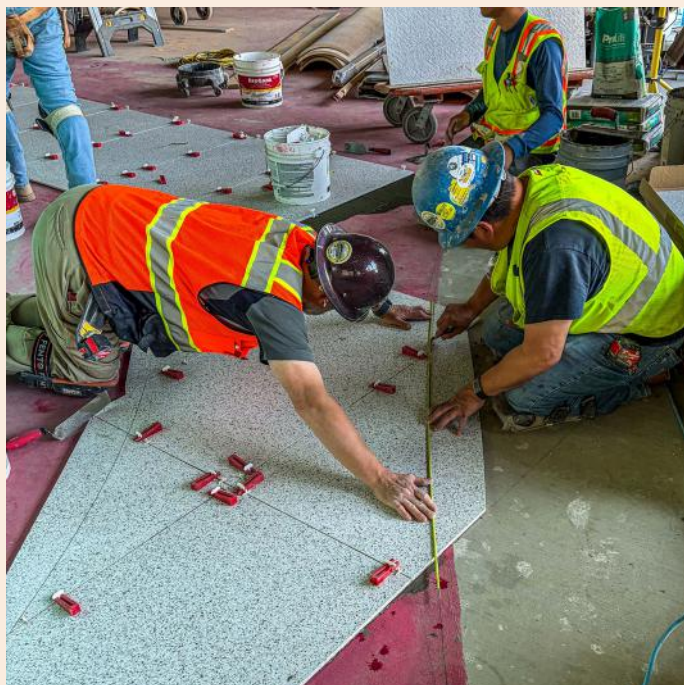


Using ProLite® to set a freshly cut floor tile around a door jamb in the tapered corridor.

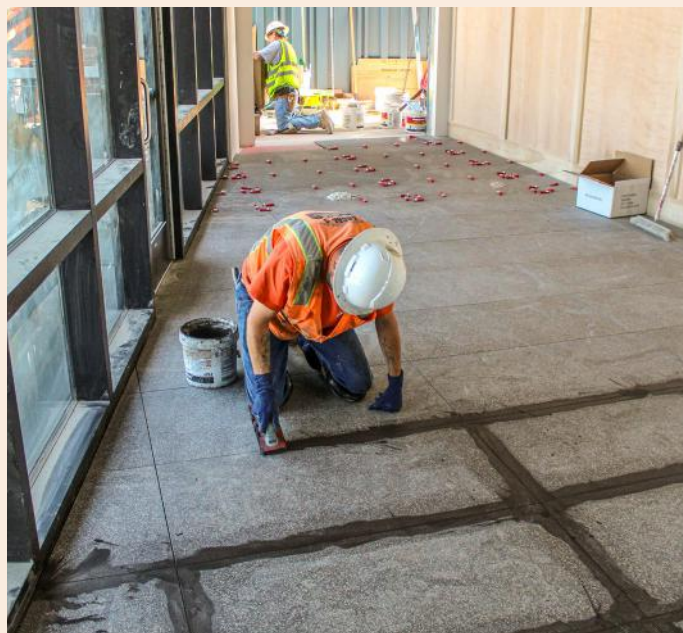
"On the floor, gravity is working with you. When you're setting tile up and around curves, if the mortar doesn't hold, everything starts to slide on you. The mortar we used held the tiles in place and made it a lot easier to keep everything lined up."

Grout: After each section was set with a variety of tile and stone, the team started grouting. They chose Prism® Ultimate Performance Grout. This maintained color consistency across phases completed weeks apart, while providing a uniform finished appearance throughout the stadium. Poulsen noted, "Grout can make or break your install. When you're working on this many areas, you want everything to clean up easily and look right when it's done."

Opening day marked the end of construction, but the tile installations will continue to be tested as thousands of fans visit the stadium season after season. Proper moisture protection, crack isolation, mortar, grout, and the skill of the installers all help the tile perform throughout the life of the facility. The 55,000 sq. ft. of tile at the Ontario Tower Buzzers stadium is a reminder that quality commercial tilework starts with the products under the tile. **TL**



A closer look at Continental's precision as installers measure and dry fit tile to achieve the curved floor design.



Finishing the installation with Prism® Ultimate Performance Grout. Because it does not require sealing and resists stains and efflorescence, installers could complete the final grout work without additional finishing steps.



The tilework around the bar and the center column adds another distinctive detail to the lounge.



Contrasting tile colors add visual interest to the bar and seating areas. The lounge is just one of many areas throughout the stadium where a CUSTOM complete installation system was used.

Commitment, craftsmanship, continuous improvement, and NTCA involvement **HELP KEEP ISLAND INSTALLER AFLOAT**



By Lesley Goddin, Editorial Director and Senior Writer

Monique DePonte

Ocean Tile, LLC, an NTCA Member since 2021, is a family-based business in Waimea, Hawai'i, begun 16 years ago by Monique DePonte and her husband Wallace.

The contractor tackles residential and commercial projects, specializing in luxury home remodels and new

construction. The scope of work ranges from a small one-shower remodel to a full 3,000-sq.-ft., five-bathroom new-construction home. The team can skillfully handle either challenge.

DePonte's company recently completed the ninth house for a luxury developer in the Mauna Lani area where



Built from natural stone, the dark bathroom at top left features Puka Lava basalt. The other bathrooms feature brushed natural coral stone. The brittle stone cracks easily and required more care and time during installation. The deceptively straightforward layout was not simple, but the result is a personal spa that you never want to leave.

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This is a great room at one of the bigger 4,500-sq.-ft. luxury homes that Ocean Tile, LLC completed. The large-format tile installed on the floor flowed throughout the entire home, onto the exterior lanai, and into curbless shower pans. Elevations had to be on point, layout needed to be tight, and installation methods dialed in, all achieved with a great team.

homes sell for \$4M-\$6M. Part of the project was installing gauged porcelain tile panels (GPTP) in all five bathrooms in each of the last four houses of the series.

“We knew it was going to be a heavy lift (pun intended), so we took the team to Texas to get trained by the NTCA,” DePonte said. “The experience was invaluable. We started that project confidently, knowing that we were trained properly. We can in all honesty say that we are the only NTCA-trained contractor in Hawai‘i in GPTP.”

The foundations of the business

Ten years ago, the couple—and the business—endured tragedy when Wallace’s brother passed away due to a jobsite injury.

“He was an artisan and true craftsman, and we honor him every day with our commitment to safety and our craft,” DePonte said. “We have plans to create a non-profit in his honor: an apprenticeship program, with an emphasis on safety.”

Galvanized by the incident, DePonte has committed to improvement professionally and personally. “I am constantly looking for training, technical and learning opportunities for my team and myself in the industry and for myself as a business owner,” she said. “I take my role as business owner very seriously and want to provide the best for my employee team. I consider them family.”

DePonte, an NTCA Women in Tile member, prioritizes

a healthy culture in her business, encompassing learning, accountability, and pride. The company mission statement is “Ocean Tile doesn’t just install tile. We build spaces families come home to and careers people are proud of, with craftsmanship that speaks for itself and a commitment that doesn’t quit.”

Ocean Tile, LLC is founded on four pillars: craftsmanship, integrity, growth, and ohana (family).

“Not many other small contracting businesses in my area are as ‘formal’ as we are in the sense of team development and structure,” she said. “In addition to all that, I am the only female-led/operated tile and stone contractor in my area, and one of few other woman-owned and operated businesses in the trades.”

She prides herself on her superior communication prowess. “These skills, combined with the skills and talents of our team, give us the upper hand and keep us busy with repeat customers: both homeowners and GCs,” DePonte said.

The NTCA advantage

What NTCA membership offers is right in line with DePonte’s goals for her company: training and networking.

“Being a part of the NTCA means I have the ability to learn, network, and grow with other tradesmen and women who take their craft as seriously as I do,” she said. “I like to nerd out on specs and details, and being in proximity of others who feel the same is awesome.



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The Mapeheat family of products includes Mapeheat Mat (pre-wired), Mapeheat Membrane (customizable), Mapeheat Cable, and programmable Mapeheat thermostats available in three formats — Mapeheat Thermo Basic, Mapeheat Thermo Touch and Mapeheat Thermo Connect (WiFi enabled to integrate with Google Assistant, Amazon Alexa and IFTTT).



To prepare for its first GTPP installation at these luxury homes, Ocean Tile, LLC took its team to Texas for the NTCA Regional Training in GTPP/S installation. On site, the biggest challenges were the "brute manual labor" to carry 14 panels to the second story, and maneuvering them in tight conditions. But the team skillfully met the challenges, and technically sound and beautiful finishes were the result.

"Personally, I want to do what I can to elevate the trades and bring back craftsmanship to not only tile but all of the building industry," she added.

DePonte is intent on signing up more contractors to NTCA to attract more NTCA programs in Hawai'i. "I see opportunity in every aspect of the NTCA," she explained. "Technical learning and training, relationship building, personal and professional growth, and growth for our business."

2027 CID

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Celebrate Industry Excellence at the 2027 Coverings Installation & Design Awards

The 2027 Coverings Installation & Design (CID) Awards are now open for entry! The CID Awards recognize exemplary projects featuring tile and stone that showcase beautiful design and impeccable installation. All projects must have been completed between January 2025 - December 2026. Multiple entries are accepted and there is no cost to enter.

Submit projects at Coverings.com/CID-awards by December 3.



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The Ocean Tile, LLC team at the NTCA GPTP/S Regional Training, with Technical Trainer Robb Roderick.

DePonte also is determined to give back to NTCA. Her contributions have been celebrated, and she is being voted in as a Regional Director for Hawai'i at Tile Solutions Plus this month.

"I am grateful to have been asked, and take this responsibility very seriously," she said. "It pushes me to be a better installer and business owner. As time goes on, with more experience and training I hope to earn the title of local 'expert' in my field."

To expand her company's credentials, DePonte plans to take the Certified Tile Installer (CTI) exam next year, along with one of her installers. "We hope to spread awareness of the importance and value of having a CTI on board, and capitalize on that within the commercial market," she said. "The homeowner market needs more education in order to see the value."

Struggles

Because of the company's island location, DePonte has access to a very small pool of journeymen installers, and those looking to relocate face a high cost of living and lack of housing. Ocean Tile continues to train within and advertise for top talent who believe in its culture and mission statement.

Cost of goods and scheduling are two other challenges. DePonte meets with customers early, clearly sets expectations for the timeline of the project, and helps to plan it all out in a way that meets both the contractor's and client's schedules.

"I put a lot of genuine time and effort in my customers and it shows in our referral network," she said. "We

sometimes face delays due to extreme weather, but we adjust, pivot, and make it work. We make sure to take care of our community that's been affected, in addition to getting the work done for the customers."

Looking to the future

DePonte said 2026 has been a "whirlwind" for Ocean Tile: traveling with the team to Coverings; lots of training, and many opportunities. The contractor finished a large luxury home project and will work with that developer on 19 more luxury homes, and custom homes for new GCs are in the works.

2027 is about Ocean Tile's core team being trained and ready with systems and processes in place with which to integrate new hires, and to step forward into quality projects on the horizon and opportunities the NTCA network has provided. "We are ready to grow into the best tile company in my area," she said.

The art of tile—and a business

Building—literally and figuratively—is DePonte's greatest joy as a contractor. As an apprentice 20 years ago, her path was unclear, but as the art and creation of tile contracting unfolded, she was "smitten with the possibility that I could actually do this on my own one day. I love creating art through tile," she said. "Then, when I became a business owner, I began to create and build something entirely new. A company. A culture. A future for myself, my family, and my team." **TL**

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ONE to ONE



BRAD YEUBANKS

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*In the One-to-One column, NTCA
Executive Director Bart Bettiga interviews
industry leaders about pertinent topics.*



Brad Yeubanks is an employee of World Insurance, which serves more than 30 states and is headquartered in New Jersey. He has been with World Insurance for five and a half years and works out of its Topeka, Kan., office. World Insurance specializes in business insurance, employee benefits, payroll and human resources solutions, and much more. It works closely with many general and specialty contractors in construction, and emphasizes safety consulting. Our conversation covers the important elements of a successful safety program and how it impacts the tile trade.



This picture illustrates how World Insurance personnel conduct required hands-on training for forklift drivers.

Can you tell our readers about World Insurance and what makes your company unique?

World Insurance is a one-stop shop for contractors. Our company, Safety Consulting, has been in business for about 50 years and was acquired by World Insurance roughly four years ago. What sets us apart is our integration of safety consulting with comprehensive insurance solutions, including workers' compensation, benefits, payroll services, and HR support.



[&]



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■ ONE-TO-ONE

We started as a regional company serving Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma, but now we can support contractors across the entire United States. We have consultants in the Northeast, connections in the Southeast, and we can work remotely or travel to clients. This flexibility is crucial because safety doesn't stop at state lines.

How do you deliver safety training and consulting, especially for companies with remote or dispersed crews?

During COVID-19, we realized getting people together in one location can be tough, so we developed the Risk Management Center—an online learning platform. Through this platform, we can deliver hundreds of trainings, track safety data sheets, provide certificates of insurance, and monitor compliance data. It's accessible from anywhere, which is perfect for remote crews or companies with multiple jobsites.

We also do in-person training because there's real value in face-to-face interaction, and we have clients across the country participating in remote safety meetings. For example, we work with a company in New Jersey where we conduct two 30-minute safety training sessions per week for their drivers, and we can even translate materials for non-English-speaking workers.

When a contractor first reaches out to World Insurance, what's the process?

The first step is always an assessment. I'll ask questions like: How many employees do you have? How many jobsites? What are your biggest risks? What keeps you up at night? These questions help me understand what the company needs and which issues are most pressing.

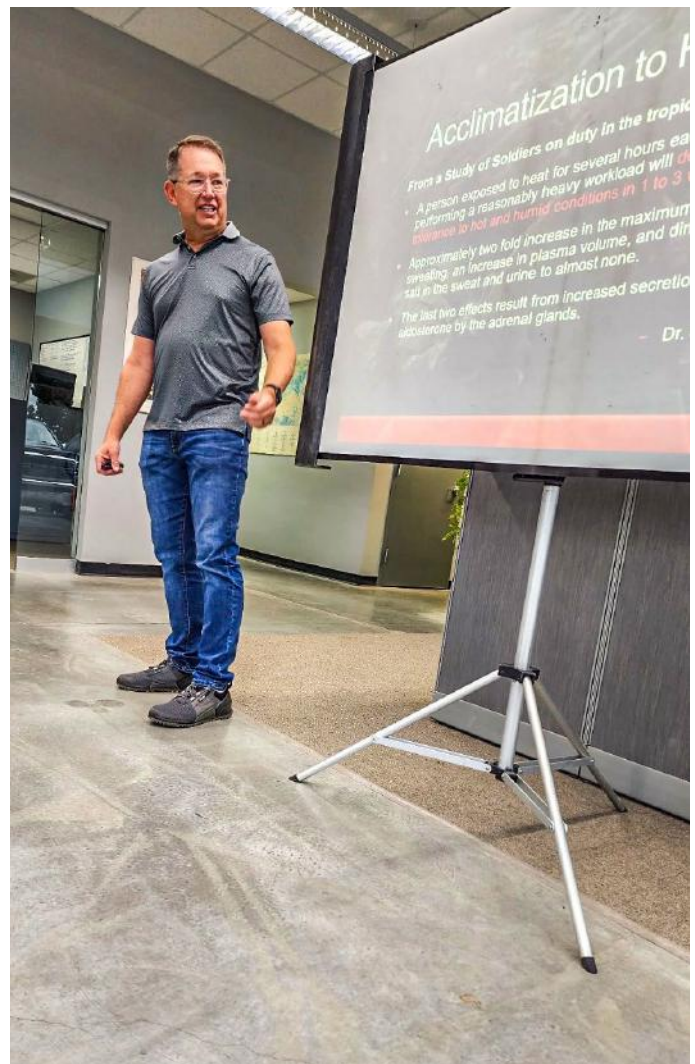
From there, we look at their current safety programs. Do they have formal safety programs in place? Are they conducting monthly or quarterly trainings, or no trainings at all? Then we assess their OSHA compliance status and put together a proposal tailored to their specific needs and goals.

How important are safety meetings, and how often should contractors hold them?

Safety meetings are critical! They keep hazards visible, reinforce safety policies, and—this is huge—they create documentation. Documentation is key because if an injury occurs, we can prove that employees received training on that specific hazard. That can make a real difference in managing claims.



World Insurance's Vice President of Safety Consulting and Senior Safety Specialist Dan Pabst leads a session on how to properly fit and use respirators.



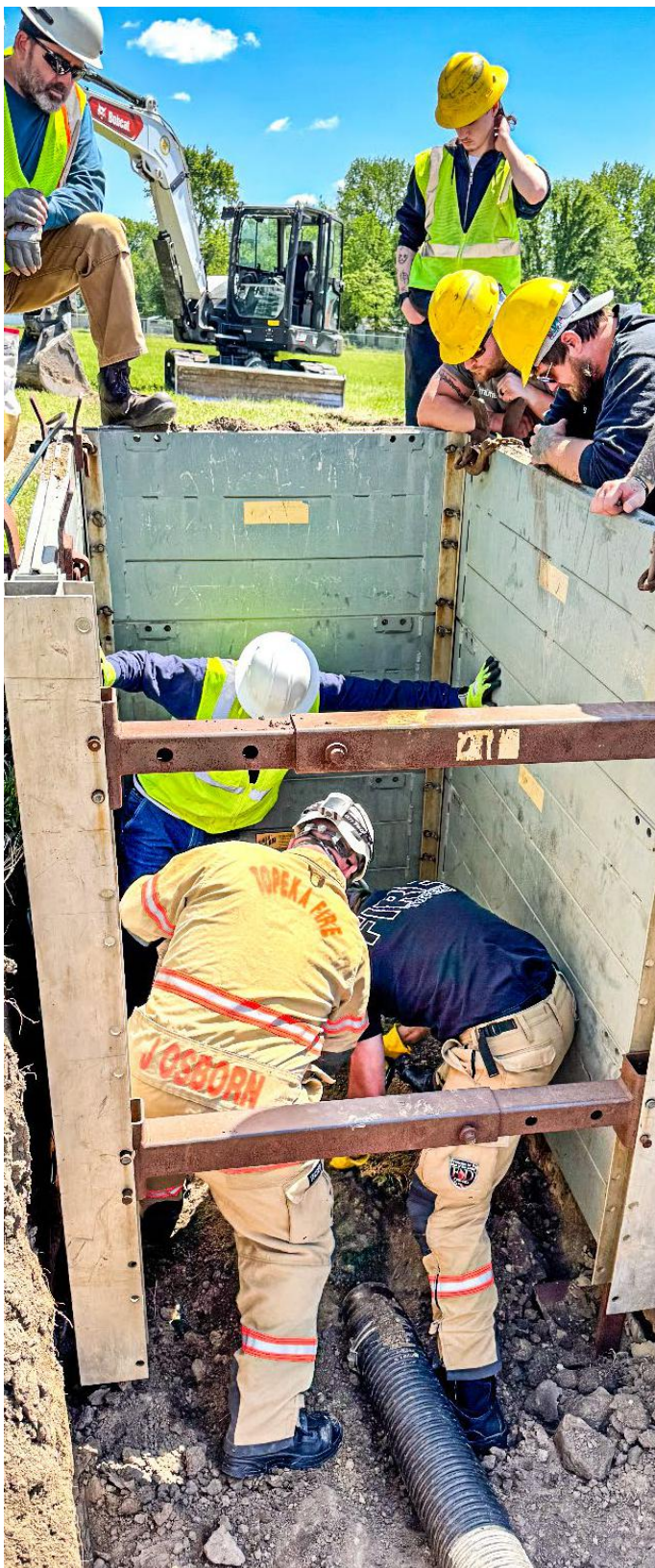
Classroom session led by World Insurance Safety Division Leader Heath Robinson on working in hot environments and how to do so safely.

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World Insurance works with other populations too. Here is a trench/excavation training involving a fire department to show how people are rescued.

Most of our clients hold monthly safety meetings, which seems to be the sweet spot. A typical meeting lasts 30-45 minutes. At a minimum, I suggest people meet at least quarterly.

Companies should also conduct daily toolbox talks—five- to 10-minute discussions where crews address that day's specific hazards. If you're working from scaffolding that day, you talk about scaffold safety. If you're using ladders, you discuss ladder safety. It keeps safety top of mind.

Do you train entire crews, or do you focus on supervisors and foremen?

We prefer to train the full staff whenever possible. Some companies ask us to train just supervisors and foremen, thinking they'll cascade the information down to workers. But the message can get confused. We've found that being in front of the workers themselves is most effective.

That said, we're flexible. We can train at a jobsite, at a company's office, or remotely. If a company has a lot of employees, we can conduct multiple sessions.

Beyond training, what other services do you provide?

We conduct safety site inspections, both announced and surprise visits. You get the true test when you show up unannounced, because you see what's happening, not what people think you want to see.

During inspections, we're looking for two things: compliance issues and unsafe actions or conditions. We also look at hazards created by other trades on-site. For example, if tile workers are in an area where other contractors are grinding, we check whether they're wearing proper hearing protection. If there are fall hazards above them, we point those out. We want to identify problems before OSHA does.

Can you talk about the correlation between effective safety programs and workers' compensation costs?

When a contractor implements and consistently enforces an effective safety program, the reasonable expectation is fewer injuries, fewer lost-time claims, lower claim costs, and eventually a lower premium. The strongest results occur when safety efforts are paired with prompt incident reporting, active claims management, and a formal return-to-work program.

Many contractors now face bid restrictions if their incident and injury scores are too high. Safety isn't just about protecting workers—it's about business viability. Companies that can't bid on jobs because of poor safety records lose revenue.

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Most World Insurance clients hold monthly safety meetings, which seems to be the sweet spot. A typical meeting lasts 30-45 minutes.

What are the most common OSHA violations and hazards you see in construction, particularly in the tile industry?

OSHA's top violations are falling protection and hazard communication. In the tile industry specifically, we see issues with ladder and scaffold use, PPE violations, improper tool use, and housekeeping problems.

Silica exposure is probably the most significant tile-specific hazard. When workers cut or fabricate stone, they're exposed to crystalline silica, which can cause serious lung disease. We address this through training, air monitoring, wet-cutting techniques, proper ventilation, and respirator fit testing.

Other concerns include ergonomic issues from repetitive bending and lifting, slip-and-fall hazards from wet floors, and inadequate documentation. "Documentation or disaster"—that's what I tell people. If you're doing safety training or anything safety-related, document it. Keep sign-in sheets, track topics, and maintain records.

How does hiring World Insurance compare to hiring an in-house safety manager?

Hiring a full-time safety manager is expensive. We bring



Scaffolding setups demonstrate how to navigate scaffolding safely and how to conduct a rescue if someone falls.

expertise, structure, and accountability at a fraction of that cost. One serious workers' compensation claim, one OSHA citation, or one lost-time injury avoided will pay for a year of our consulting.

We offer flexible monthly retainers tailored to each client's needs. Some companies want two site inspections per month; others want access to our training platform and program reviews. There are no long-term contracts, so companies can adjust their scope as needs change or test our partnership with a six-month trial.

Is mental health and wellness part of your safety programs?

Absolutely! Construction has one of the highest suicide rates of any industry. We promote awareness and provide resources, including information about the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. We also encourage companies to develop health and wellness programs because it shows employees that leadership cares about their well-being, which supports retention and creates a stronger safety culture. **TL**

For more information about World Insurance, reach out to Brad Yeubanks at 785-234-1005 or bradyeubanks@worldinsurance.com.



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What mental and emotional PPE do you use in daily life? Do you choose your mindset, pause when emotions overwhelm, lean on trusted friends, feed your mind with inspirational or motivational content, and take time for rest and play?

Company leaders also shape a critical layer of safety: workplace culture. Do people feel safe to speak up and genuinely valued in your organization? In employee meetings, how do you demonstrate support, and build trust, confidence, respect, and psychological safety? Think about it.



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SAFETY should NEVER take a DAY OFF



By Scott Carothers, Academic Director, CTEF

Everyone would agree that workplace safety is important, but why do accidents occur? Many times, accidents happen due to carelessness, haste, or a lack of training. But none of these excuses are valid, especially when someone is injured. The thought that “It will never happen to me” is a false hope that has no future.

Several popular quotes offer some insight. Some may consider them cliché, but they ring true:

- Luck runs out, but safety is good for life.
- Safety isn’t expensive, it is priceless.
- Never give safety a day off.
- Safety is a full-time job; don’t make it part-time practice.

How OSHA can help you maintain a safe working environment

The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 states the following:

“To assure safe and healthful working conditions for working men and women; by authorizing enforcement of the standards developed under the Act; by assisting and encouraging the States in their efforts to assure safe and healthful working conditions; by providing for research, information, education, and training in the field of occupational safety and health.”

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards serve all facets of the jobsite, from small residential jobs to large commercial projects. Some folks are fearful of an OSHA inspection, but if requested, OSHA will conduct an on-site inspection noting the areas needing improvement, and will not issue a citation. However, this review should be a wake-up call that encourages the employer to modify and implement safety procedures prior to a subsequent inspection.

It is important to know the safety issues that affect people on the job. OSHA ranks these top 10 situations that result in citations, from the least to the most frequent:

- Machine guards – angle grinders
- Eye protection
- Forklift operation



A thinset mixer requires constant cleaning. Always disconnect the mixer from the power source before cleaning.



This installer (author Scott Carothers) has the appropriate PPE, safety boots, eye and ear protection, as well as a secure way to keep the extension cord connection safe and dry.

- Scaffolding
- Fall protection training
- Respiratory protection
- Lockout/tagout (LOTO): Lockout blocks the power source, while tagout provides a prominent warning that the tool is out of service but doesn’t physically eliminate use.
- Ladders
- Hazard communications: Safety Data Sheets (SDS) are detailed documents provided by manufacturers instructing workers and emergency staff on how to safely handle the product.
- Fall protection equipment—the number one safety issue for 15 years straight



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ONLINE LEARNING

NTCA University is a comprehensive online platform offering tile installation courses designed for individuals new to the industry or those seeking to refresh their skills. These courses are an excellent resource for training or apprenticeship programs, ensuring that learners are equipped with industry-standard methods and practices before applying their knowledge through hands-on or on-the-job learning. Additionally, these courses are beneficial for sales associates and professionals in other roles within the tile industry, providing valuable insights into the principles and processes of tile installation. NTCA University also features business courses tailored to small business owners. Accessible 24/7 via computer, tablet, or smartphone, NTCA University allows learners the flexibility to study at their convenience.

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Notice that this finisher keeps his back straight to minimize injury, while also using offset box stacking to eliminate finger pinching.



All electrical plugs must have a grounding connector that safeguards the use of electricity, especially in a wet area. Note that the grounding connector is missing in this image.

PPE

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is designed to protect the worker from jobsite hazards that could cause injuries or illnesses.

Installers need to be extra cautious if they have developed a sensitivity to certain chemicals found on many jobsites, including epoxies (see Ask the Experts on page 58 for more on this issue). In this case, PPE may not effectively protect the worker from the product components. The solution may be the sensitized or allergic person being off-site while the product is in use.

Liquids

Something as innocuous as water on a floor can be the cause of many slip/fall situations. The operation of a wet saw or wet grinding equipment can allow water to remain on a horizontal surface, causing a person walking through the wet area to lose their footing and fall, risking serious injury. Always keep a mop and wringer bucket close, and require people to mop up spills or wet surfaces to eliminate the problem.

Electricity

Work in the tile industry combines two items that do not play well together: electricity and water. Almost every

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Meridio



Properly-erected scaffolding provides a stable and safe work environment.



The installer can safely cut materials when protected by ANSI A4 cut gloves, which are mandatory during CTEF training and Certified Tile Installer (CTI) testing.

tile job has a wet saw set up to make difficult cuts that are not possible on a snap cutter. But the electricity in a wet environment can be a shock hazard that can kill. Always use an approved Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) to lessen the potential shock risk.

Written safety plans

Written safety plans play a critical role in protecting employees, while also meeting related OSHA requirements. Numerous providers supply templates that can be used to establish a plan and be updated as the need arises. These plans delineate activities in compliance so employers can avoid fines, define safety responsibilities, reduce injuries, and demonstrate the company's commitment to safety.

Insurance

Although it is not a direct safety concern, the cost of workers' compensation (workers' comp) insurance can be reduced by having a safety plan, instituting and continuing toolbox talks/safety meetings, and working diligently on your safety procedures. Further cost reductions can be achieved by monitoring and reducing your experience modification rate (EMR), also known as your mod rate. Regularly review your EMR spreadsheets for accuracy and reduce injury claim frequency through proactive safety plans.

Lifting

Safe lifting practices are crucial to minimizing or eliminating back injuries. Leg muscles are stronger than

back muscles. Squat down to pick up the box or bag, pull it close to the chest, and use leg muscles to stand up, keeping your back straight. Additionally, when stacking heavy boxes, offset the next box from the last one to keep fingers safe, rather than pinching them between the boxes.

Extension cords

Although not required by OSHA, flat extension cords may be the better choice since they do not roll when stepped on. When possible, route extension cords away from travel areas. In high-traffic areas it may be wise to hang the cord along the sides and top of the door frame.

Inspection of an extension cord should be completed on a regular basis to determine if the outer jacket has been cut or severely damaged. Be certain to check that the grounding connector on the male end of the cord is in place and tightly attached. Cords with missing grounding connectors should be tagged out for repair or replacement.

Keep it clean

The jobsite should always be kept clean for a positive appearance, but more importantly, to eliminate trip/fall hazards, especially when carrying heavy objects.

Ladders and scaffolds

OSHA has strict requirements on the proper placement and erection of ladders and scaffolding. Never stand above the manufacturer's recommended step level on ladders, and do not use the ladder rungs or platforms to store tools or materials that could fall and injure a person below the ladder.

How CTEF safeguards the site

During training classes and certification testing, the Ceramic Tile Education Foundation (CTEF) utilizes some simple safety practices.

- In wet interior environments, place the extension cord connection on the open top of a bucket to segregate it from moisture and a possible shock hazard.
- Always unplug the thinset mixer when not in use, and particularly when it is being cleaned.
- The use of cut-resistant gloves when using a utility knife or other sharp tools is mandatory.
- Wearing nitrile gloves when mixing and using thin-set mortars and grouts protects your hands from the drying effect of these products.

Always think before acting. It could save your life or the lives of those around you. **TL**



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Can you become allergic to epoxy grout?

QUESTION

I have been installing tile for more than 20 years and have used epoxy grout many times without any problems. I recently hired a new employee, and while helping me grout a job, he broke out in an itchy rash and hives on his hands and arms. We were both working with the same product, but I did not have any reaction.

Why would epoxy grout affect him and not me? Is it possible that he is allergic to it, and what should I do before allowing him to work with epoxy grout again?

ANSWER

The short answer is that different people can react differently to the same product. His reaction may have been simple skin irritation, or it may have been an allergic reaction. It is not possible to know which one it was just by looking at the rash, so he should be checked by a medical professional before working with that product again.

Epoxy grout normally has multiple parts that must be



Before the components of multiple-part epoxy grout cure, some of the chemicals can irritate the skin. Some people can become sensitized to those chemicals, develop an allergy, and react when they come in contact with the product again.

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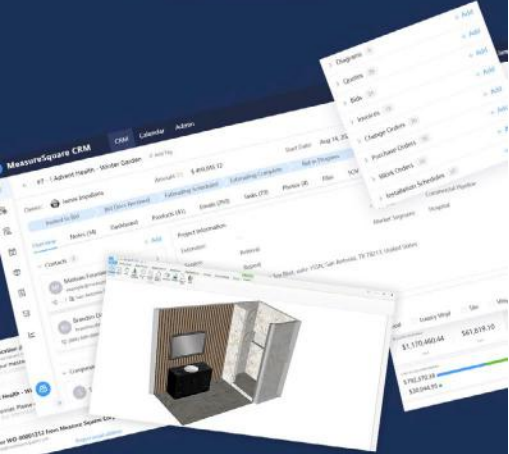


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mixed together. Before those parts cure, some of the chemicals can irritate the skin. Some people can also become sensitized to those chemicals. In simple terms, this means their body has developed an allergy and may react when they come in contact with the product again.

The amount of exposure needed to cause a reaction is not the same for everyone. One installer may get epoxy on his skin several times without noticing a problem, while another installer may react after a much smaller exposure. Cuts, scratches, dry skin, sweating, contaminated clothing, and how long the material stays on the skin can also make a difference.

Your employee may have come in contact with epoxy or similar products at another job or while working on a hobby. What appears to be his first exposure to epoxy grout may not be the first time his body has been exposed to the same type of chemicals.

It is also important to understand that your years of using epoxy grout without a reaction do not mean you can never develop one. Some installers work with epoxy products for years before they begin having problems. Once someone becomes allergic, even a small amount of contact may cause another reaction.

When a skin reaction happens, the employee should stop working with the product, remove any contaminated clothing, and wash the affected area according to the first-aid directions in the product's Safety Data Sheet. Do not use alcohol, solvents or other harsh cleaners to remove epoxy from the skin. These products can damage the skin and may make the exposure worse.

If the employee has trouble breathing or develops swelling around the face, lips, tongue or throat, treat it as an emergency and seek medical help immediately.

Before using any epoxy grout, read the manufacturer's instructions and the Safety Data Sheets for every part of the product. Wear the gloves and eye protection recommended by the manufacturer, along with long sleeves or other protective clothing needed to keep the uncured material off the skin. Not every type of disposable glove protects against every chemical, so do not assume that any glove will do the job.

Replace gloves when they become torn or contaminated. Avoid touching your face, phone, tools or door handles with dirty gloves, and clean spills before the epoxy is spread around the work area.

Epoxy grout is a great product when it is used correctly, but experience alone does not protect an installer from a chemical reaction. The best protection is to follow the manufacturer's safety instructions and keep uncured epoxy off your skin. **TL**



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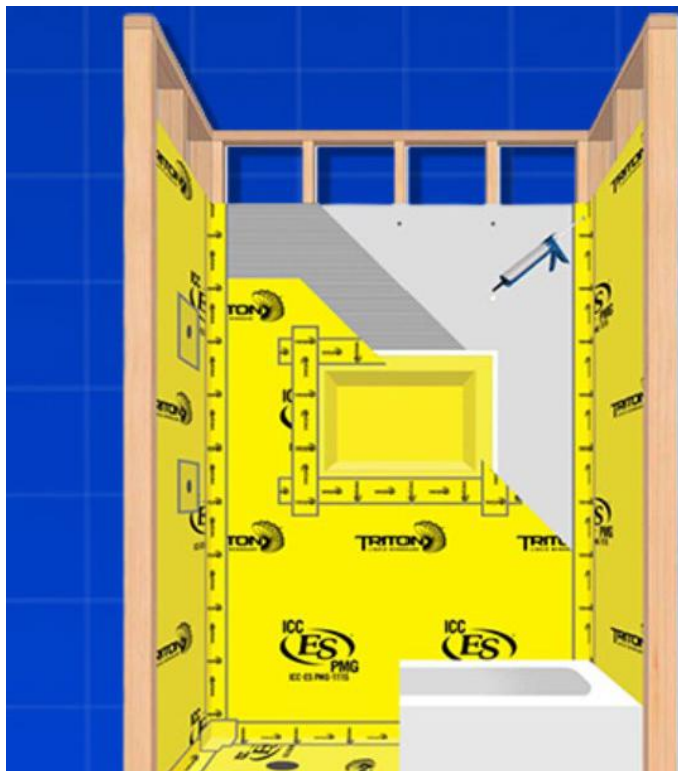
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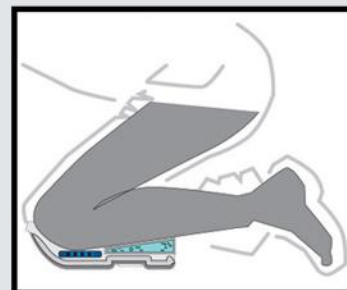
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Emser Tile's four new glazed porcelain collections offer a calm, neutral palette and durability suitable for residential and commercial spaces. Capisco™ (shown) evokes the natural layers and soft veining of quartzite with five unique faces, a V2 shade variation rating, and a large-format 24" x 47" option. Duchessa™ recalls white marble with silver and brown-gold veining in matte and polished finishes. Tortola™ has the delicate tonal variation of limestone, and a refined, contemporary aesthetic. Etrana™ is a glossy dimensional wall tile in five Mediterranean-inspired colors with a subtle concave profile that adds light and movement to interior spaces.

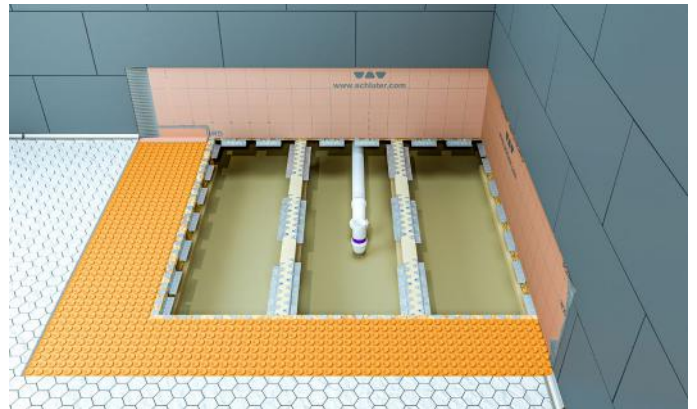
SCHLUTER-SYSTEMS

Schluter-Systems has launched KERDI-SHOWER-FRS, a floor recessing system that simplifies the installation of curbless showers without cutting or modifying structural floor joists. The system uses pre-engineered, galvanized steel brackets to create a stable support structure for the recessed subfloor assembly required for curbless shower installations. It's compatible with both dimensional lumber and engineered I-joist construction, for joist spacing up to 19.2" o.c. Two kits accommodate showers of various sizes, and bracket kits are also available for larger or customized shower footprints.



APE GRUPO

In Ape Grupo's new satin-finish Arka ceramic wall tile collection, light, relief, and color create ever-changing surfaces through smooth and textured pieces, two formats, and a palette of 10 shades. The collection combines a smooth piece with three relief designs—Arka, Ona, and Forma—which can be used independently or integrated within the same surface to create continuous expanses, introduce transitions in texture, or concentrate relief in specific areas to reinforce the identity of a space. The collection is inspired by how time affects stone, metal, and mineral pigments, transforming nature with fresh nuances.



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The **National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA)** recently accepted three more companies into its NTCA Five-Star Accredited Contractors program, which celebrates companies that meet the highest standards of excellence, craftsmanship, and professionalism in the tile industry. The companies include: Flooring 323, Inc., Honolulu, Hawai'i; Carmella Tile Marble & Design, Inc., Pittsburgh, Pa.; and KZ Tile Company in South San Francisco, Calif...Houzz, Inc. has opened the call for applications for its annual **Houzz Scholarship Program**, which is part of its ongoing commitment to help the next generation of construction and design professionals launch successful careers through financial support, industry-leading technology, and educational resources. Deadline for entries is March 31, 2027...Tiffany Robinson, former Secretary of Labor for the state of Maryland, has joined **Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC)** as the association's vice president of workforce and safety policy. She brings deep experience in executive leadership, workforce development, public policy, and infrastructure to ABC...Simplar Foundation has released **Multiskilling in the U.S. Construction Industry Report**, the largest national dataset documenting the relationship between multiskilling labor strategies and performance outcomes, including productivity, staffing levels, and schedule durations. One key finding is that multiskilling increased the share of time crews spent on directly advancing construction work by 39%...**Paramount Global Surfaces (PGS)**, parent company of Happy Floors and Stone Source, announced two key additions to its leadership team: Clark Cornelius as Chief Operations Officer of Paramount Global Surfaces and David Raymond as Executive Vice President of Happy Floors...**Coverings** returns to Orlando, Fla., April 6-9, 2027. It has opened its registration portal as well as submissions for the CID Awards and nominations for the Coverings Rock Star Program...**The National Association of Home Builders' (NAHB)** first-quarter 2026 research revealed that California, Texas, and Florida together continue to account for the largest share of remodeling activity nationwide, over 20%...Charlie Leach has joined **RTC Products** as the company's new Outside Sales Account Manager. A Certified Tile Installer (CTI #1600) and CTI Evaluator, Leach brings more than 25 years of experience as a tile contractor, along with extensive technical and field knowledge of professional tile installation...NTCA recently announced a strategic affiliation with the **Tile Association of New Zealand (TANZ)**, an important step to advancing tile industry standards, education, and professional development globally.

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