

TECHNICAL DATA SHEET	DESCRIPTION	DATE
TDS 55	REMOVING BITUMEN	SEPTEMBER 2025

TECHNICAL DATA SHEET

In years gone by, most flooring was installed using bitumen-based adhesive. Bitumen is inherently a reasonable waterproofing agent and therefore was quite successful as both an adhesive and a moisture barrier.

Bitumen is easily identified as a black substance that is firmly adhered to the screed, remaining behind after the floor covering is removed. Due to the nature of bitumen, it seeps into the screed and is therefore very difficult to remove. Modern self-levelling and smoothing compounds as well as acrylic adhesives are unable to bind to bitumen. It is essential to remove the bitumen before you can begin floor preparation for your new floor covering. If you do floor preparation over the top of bitumen you face the risk of delamination and a failed installation.

Sanding off the bitumen simply heats it up and becomes sticky. Chipping it off with a paint scraper is extremely difficult. Grinding with a carborundum machine and using silica sand as a grinding medium is somewhat successful.

We recommend the following method:

Use an HTC (or equivalent) grinding machine which has the capability of grinding off the bitumen. These machines are available in different sizes for purchase or for hire and leave a very clean smooth surface to begin your floor preparation on. If none of these are available to you, it is strongly advised that you contact the manufacturer of the screed preparation products you will be using for further advice and assistance.

Always perform a moisture test prior to beginning your floor preparation. Bitumen is inherently a waterproofing agent, which may have impeded the upward ingress of moisture. Bitumen is less affected by moisture than any other adhesive product and can therefore give a misleading impression that the original flooring was dry. This will also give a misleading moisture reading if doing a surface moisture test. It is therefore imperative that a below surface moisture test, drilling at least 40-50 mm into the screed base, is done to get an accurate reading of what is below the surface. A meter with probes or electronic sensors must be used to judge the moisture situation below the surface.

Failure to do a proper moisture test may cause adhesion problems after the new flooring is installed, will be difficult, and expensive to rectify. If required, you need to then apply a moisture barrier.



Once the moisture barrier has been applied, the surface should then have a blinding layer of screed/cement material applied over the damp proof membrane. Because bitumen seeps into the screed, there will always be an invisible trace of bitumen left behind therefore this blinding coat is advisable to block out the effect of any bitumen leaching into the newly applied adhesive.

Remove all dust and surface contamination, apply a primer coat of bonding liquid from the same product range that you will use for the blinding/blocking coat mixed in the following ratio

4 parts screed powder (10 litres screed powder)
0.8 parts water (2 litres clean water)
0.2 parts matching bonding liquid (500 ml bonding liquid)

It is important to use a suitable and approved screed/cement product as not all screeding compounds will be suitable for this type of application, and it is always advisable to check with the manufacturers regarding their recommended mixing instructions.

Once the blinding coat has been applied, you can continue with your screed preparation as per normal.

When renovating, always check if bitumen was used to adhere the previous floor coverings, thereby allowing for sufficient time, budget, and preparation for removal without any nasty surprises or delays in your project.