

## Interface

Less glamorous than its pretty counterpart, face fiber, carpet backing is the workhorse of the carpet tile. Although it is rarely seen by most walking on it, the specification of carpet backing is at least as important as the aesthetic value of the face of the carpet. Interface first introduced GlasBac<sup>®</sup>, the highest performing backing in the industry, nearly 30 years ago. Today, specifiers are increasingly interested in GlasBac<sup>®</sup>RE, the recycled content cousin to GlasBac. When John Wells, president of Interface Flooring Systems, thinks about backing, he promises:

“Interface will not produce an inferior or poor performing product in the name of sustainability. It flies in the face of what is at the heart of sustainability. Nor will we waste valuable resources looking for new raw materials when we know there are more than 250 million pounds of vinyl backed carpet tiles out there, available to be reclaimed and recycled. Our commitment to reclaim and recycle millions of yards of carpet—ours and others, is the right and smart thing to do. We can use landfill-bound materials to create the products of the future, taking responsibility for what we and others did before we understood the consequences of the ‘take, make, waste’ paradigm of the First Industrial Revolution.”

John also offers the following insights on carpet backing and the key considerations for a customer:

**Performance:** Does the backing stand up to the traffic flow while providing the comfort needed underfoot? **Delamination**, or separation of backing from face fiber, adds significant costs in terms of maintenance and replacement, and is **one of the most common problems with poor performing backing**. Delamination can result from anything from an inferior backing product to a product that requires too much adhesive. **Tapping** is another problem—when a carpet tile doesn’t lie completely flat and an air pocket causes it to lift slightly. Though it might not be visible to the eye, you’ll hear a tapping sound when you walk across it and the tile hits the subfloor.

[A good question to ask: How is adhesive for your backing applied? If the answer is “with a tool called a notch trowel” you’ll know it’s more adhesive than should be necessary to provide a secure and stable floor underfoot. Modular carpet is meant to be a freelay product that requires little if any adhesive.]

**Ergonomics:** Different environments require a different flooring surface. In healthcare facilities, rollability is paramount; in a retail environment a cushion underfoot is key. **It’s unrealistic to think that one backing can meet the myriad of needs out there.**

[A good question to ask: Has this backing been tested in the environment where it is being specified? If the answer is “no,” you may be taking a chance that it won’t perform as well as it should.]

**Composition:** There’s a common misperception that carpet backing is composed of one material. The fact is, **the best performing backing products are a combination of materials that provide for different attributes, such as flexibility and stability**—the two hallmarks of a high performing backing. For example, Interface’s GlasBac (vinyl) and GlasBacRE (recycled vinyl) are composed primarily of minerals—68%—and contain additional recycled materials.

[A good question to ask: What is the composition of your product’s backing layer? If the answer doesn’t include a mix of polymers and stabilizers, you may be sacrificing performance and end up replacing your floor before it has reached the end of its useful life.]

**Life Cycle Assessment:** Among the many environmental attributes you review when choosing a backing product, experts cite life cycle assessment as the most relevant. **A life cycle assessment gets to the heart of the matter, revealing useful information about what has occurred during the production of the product and what the potential is for reuse, repurposing or recycling.** It’s here that materials like vinyl must be fully examined.

[A good question to ask? Can I see an environmental product declaration on this product? This document will summarize a life cycle assessment, if it is available.]