

THE FUTURE OF FLOORING

nora goes from a small family business in the 1930s to a sustainable powerhouse

By Laura Rote

Tim Cole is no stranger to sustainability. He's worked in the field for years, holding positions like head of global sustainability and sitting on numerous sustainability committees. Now, as the vice president of marketing for **nora systems**, he's part of a team that's expanding on an already progressive approach, with a goal to make the best flooring products for customers and the environment alike.

nora itself can be traced back to the 1930s in Weinheim, Germany, under the original name of Freudenberg, a company that made sleeve gaskets and rubber shoe soles. The name nora began being used in 1949 for the company's newly established business unit of rubber floor coverings. The name evolved from the Latin form of the chemist **Walter Nürnberger's** name, who was responsible for the rubber shoe soles of that time.

nora's commitment to sustainability began on day one. The products are made from high-quality industrial rubber and natural rubber, which is a rapidly renewable material. The rubber is supplemented by raw mineral materials extracted from natural deposits and environmentally compatible color pigments. More than 60% of the raw materials are sourced locally.

But it's not just the materials that make nora sustainable. It's everything else, too.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Cole says nora is looking at both its commitment to the environment as well as providing a high-performing

product to customers, the largest of which are hospitals. A product's life cycle and durability plays an important role in the sustainability story as well, he says, adding that some manufacturers get caught up in looking at environmental footprint but deliver products that fail to accomplish their set task. "We want to make sure we show our commitment to sustainability, but at the same time give a high-performing product to the customer."

First and foremost, customers want flooring that is easy to install and easy to clean, Cole says. A sustainable product is the icing on the cake. "After they find out it's easy to install, easy to clean, it has acoustical benefits, ergonomic benefits, it's slip resistant, and all these main attributes, then customers ask, 'What is your sustainability story?'"

That's when he's able to get into all of the other benefits—nora's low emissions, indoor air quality, and the fact that it eliminates the need for harsh chemicals, requiring only water for cleaning, for instance. nora's floor coverings are also GREENGUARD Gold Certified for low-VOC emissions, a high-level certification that offers stringent criteria to meet the strict emissions levels required by UL Environment.

SMARTER PRODUCTS

nora isn't simply selling flooring, though they do that very well—you'll find their flooring in such high-profile places as the **New York City Subway** and **London City Hall**. But what the company is really focused on is establishing long-lasting relationships with customers, asking, "What will benefit the end user?"

For nora, the journey of improvement is continuous, and the company is not afraid to push the envelope. "That's our main goal—to be the most customer-driven product manufacturer in the flooring industry," Cole says.

Just look at the **pro steamer system** nora developed. It gives health facilities a non-disruptive way



BRIGHT BENEFITS

The benefits of nora flooring are many—improved safety, indoor air quality, easy to clean, high sound absorption, among other things. In a health care setting, sound and comfort are especially important, as staff are on their feet all day and no one wants to hear noisy carts rolling back and forth.

Of course, the fact that nora's floors are stain-resistant is vital, too. They require no harsh chemicals to clean them—just water or steam, and you're done. A dense, nonporous surface eliminates the need for waxing or sealing. Since they don't contain PVC, nora's floors are also guaranteed to not generate any hydrochloric acid, dioxins, or furans in the event of fire. nora flooring is also free of plasticizers (i.e. phthalates) and halogens (e.g. chlorine) and Greenguard Gold certified for low-emissions.

And the durable floor coverings have extended life cycles, typically 30 years, so they reduce the need for frequent removal and disposal.

DID YOU KNOW? 80% of costs generally associated with floor coverings come from maintenance. As nora rubber





to clean that relies on steam to deep-clean nora flooring in patient spaces. It uses distilled water—no chemicals—and has no VOCs or weird smells. It also has a special microfiber pad that does not become saturated as it absorbs dirt, so drying time is short and you're less likely to slip or fall.

Then there's **nora nTx**, a huge time-saver in settings like hospitals, as the pre-applied, solvent-free adhesive backing minimizes prep work and eliminates drying protocols. At **Reading Hospital** in Pennsylvania, a project that seemed to be behind before it even got started, time was of the essence for a 476,000-square-

foot expansion. "Using the nora product with nTx, you can turn a patient room around in a single day instead of three days," Cole says.

Project staff said nora saved them two months in construction. "It eliminated the need to put a moisture mitigation system down on the concrete slabs prior to application of the flooring product," says **Jeff Hutwelker**, project executive for **LF Driscoll**. The product is resistant to high moisture vapor emissions and extensive pH limits, eliminating the need for moisture testing and remediation before installation.

Cole says nora nTx also eliminates other common problems in resilient flooring with wet adhesive, like applying too much or not enough or getting bubbles. "nora with nTx totally eliminates that issue," he says. And it's not shiny like many floors, which can be disorienting to patients. The peel-and-stick process is quick and easy, and the solvent-

▲ **THIS SPREAD**
From making better shoes possible in the 1930s to providing groundbreaking floor solutions in settings like hospitals, nora systems continues to raise the bar.

floors do not require any waxing, stripping, or finishing, those costs and the impact on the environment are low.



free environmentally compatible adhesive is designed to stay down for decades. And the polyethylene film can go right in the recycling bin. Plus, when you're done, you're done. There's no drying or curing time like with other products. You can move that hospital bed right back in and get back to work.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Most recently, nora has been looking at how it can use new green chemistry to develop even more new and exciting products. "We're trying to develop products using different green chemistry to address those customers who still have a demand for an alternative."

"Now we're seeing the push toward transparency. People want to talk about what raw materials go into a product. 'What are the impacts of the ingredients?'" Cole says. "It's up to the product manufacturers like nora that have had long-term commitment to sustainability to evaluate where we are and what we're doing and say, 'Now how do we raise the bar? What is our next commitment going to be?'"

nora is no stranger to sharing the details about its products, which have EPDs, or environmental product declarations, revealing the life-cycle environmental impact of products. The company has an EPD for both its noraplan sheet and tile products and the norament tile products, which cover the entire range of their core product offering. Cole also recently joined the **Health Product Declaration (HPD) Collaborative** board of directors—an organization committed to improving the building industry's performance through transparency, openness, and innovation. The organization is committed to accurate reporting of material contents and potential health hazards. nora's also involved in the **International Living Future Institute** (working with ILFI to evaluate nora's products in the Declare certification program), is looking at **Cradle to Cradle**, and was previously involved in the **Pharos Project**. "We figure if we're going to do this transparency thing, we might as well be involved with as many of these projects as we can to meet the demands," Cole says.

ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOUNTABILITY

nora employees are committed to reducing their carbon footprint in general, too. The company's recycling program encompasses paper, bottles, computers, and office equipment as well as the use

of recycled shipping materials and office furniture. Lighting motion sensors, low mercury compact fluorescent lights, and programmable thermostats save energy. And even the coffee and tea employees drink is fair trade.

Worldwide, nora contributes to various charities by volunteering time. "If you go and spend a day volunteering, which we encourage, we don't dock your pay. This is part of what we want you to do," Cole says. At the main office in New Hampshire, employees contribute to a charity called **The Upper Room**, which helps families in need get back on their feet. The company doesn't just contribute financially, but employees are also encouraged to give in other ways, like with a recent shoe drive. "We want our employees to live and have the same sustainability commitment the company does," Cole says. "Everyone thinks about the planet part but not the people part. It's just as important internally in an organization as it is externally." **gb&d**

ABOUT NORA

- Leading manufacturer of commercial rubber flooring
- 60-plus years in rubber floor coverings
- Popular in hospitals, schools, public buildings, transit, and more
- More than a dozen offices worldwide and represented in around 80 countries through export partners
- Eco-label Blue Angel for noraplan standard floor coverings
- GREENGUARD Indoor Air Quality of the GREENGUARD Environmental Institute (GEI), USA



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**TIM COLE
NORA SYSTEMS**