

What Does Commercial Flooring Cost?

What affects pricing and how to compare proposals

By **Henry Hunt**, Partner, Topcoat Services USA · For owners, facility managers, contractors and specifiers



Decorative flake broadcast with a polyaspartic topcoat, commercial back-of-house.

The question we hear most is “what’s it cost per square foot?” It’s a fair question. The honest answer is that the number often depends more on the slab, the schedule and the scope than on what’s in the bucket. Two proposals for the same floor can be far apart and both be reasonable. Or one of them is quietly missing part of the work.

1 Why the square-foot price moves

On many of the projects we price, labor, equipment, prep and time on site make up a larger share of the number than owners expect. That split varies with the system, the slab and the schedule. These are the things that move it.

The system. A 30-mil epoxy and a 3/8" urethane cement are both “resinous floors,” but they’re very different amounts of material and labor. Topcoat chemistry and broadcast add up too.

The slab. Bare, sound concrete is usually the cheapest starting point. Existing coatings, thinset, mastic, heavy patching, cracks and joints all add prep time.

Size and layout. Open floor goes fast. Small rooms, equipment bases, columns, drains and doorways slow everything down.

Schedule. Nights, weekends, short shutdown windows and multiple phases each add cost.

Site conditions. Power, heat, ventilation, access and dust containment in an occupied building. In New England winters, keeping a slab warm enough to install can be its own line item.

Details. Cove base, drains, joint treatment, slope to drain and transitions to other flooring.

Why small jobs cost more per foot

Mobilizing, setting up, testing and cleaning up cost about the same on a 500 SF kitchen as on a 5,000 SF one. Spread over fewer square feet, the per-foot number climbs. That's normal, not padding.

2 Prep is often one of the biggest variables

If two prices are far apart, prep is a good place to look first. Grinding a clean slab to the right profile is one thing. Removing an old coating, thinset or mastic can take as long as installing the new floor, or longer.

Some proposals assume bare concrete and carry anything else as a change order. Others carry prep as an allowance. Neither is wrong, but you need to know which one you're looking at. Ask how the contractor plans to prep (grinding, shot blasting, scarifying), what surface profile the product data sheet requires, and what happens if they find something under the existing floor.

Prep also has a lot to do with how long the floor lasts. A cheaper number that comes from less prep is rarely a saving.



Diamond grinding with dust collection.

3 Line items that get left out

These are items we often see missing or vague when owners send us a competing proposal to look at.

Item	Why it matters	What to ask
Moisture testing	Slab moisture is a common contributor to coating failures.	Is ASTM F2170 testing included? What happens if results exceed product limits?
Moisture mitigation	A mitigation primer can add meaningful cost.	Included, carried as an alternate, or excluded?
Existing coating removal	Can take as long as the new install.	Does the price assume bare concrete?
Crack and joint repair	Quantity is hard to know before prep.	Included, or priced per linear foot?
Cove base	Sanitary rooms usually need it.	What height, and how many linear feet?
Drains and slope	Pitching to drain is a separate scope.	Is any sloping included?
Mobilizations	Each phase means another setup.	How many trips are in the price?
After-hours work	Premium labor rates apply.	Is the schedule priced as nights or weekends?
Temporary power, heat, ventilation	Cure and odor control depend on it.	Who provides it, and is it in the number?
Warranty	Workmanship and material are separate.	How long, who issues it, and what voids it?

4 How to compare proposals side by side

Lay the proposals next to each other and check that they're pricing the same floor.

1. **Named products.** "Epoxy floor" isn't a spec. Look for the manufacturer and product name for every layer.
2. **Thickness.** Mils or inches for the whole system, not just "two coats."
3. **Prep method and profile.** How the slab gets prepared and to what CSP per ICRI 310.2R and the product data sheet.
4. **Moisture.** Whether testing is included and what the plan is if results exceed limits.
5. **Quantities.** Square feet, cove linear feet and number of drains should match across proposals.
6. **Schedule.** Days on site, return-to-service times and number of mobilizations.
7. **Exclusions.** Read them as carefully as the scope. That's where the real differences hide.
8. **Who does the work.** Ask whether the prep and install are done by the contractor's own crews or subcontracted out.

Red flags

A price per square foot with no product named. Prep described as “as needed.” No mention of moisture at all. “Or equal” substitutions without approval language. A warranty that doesn’t say what it covers. Exclusions that run longer than the scope.

5 Comparing cost over the life of the floor

A floor that costs more up front can be the cheaper floor over time, and the reverse can also be true. For some facilities, the cost of being closed for a recoat or repair exceeds the cost of the flooring itself. For others, downtime is cheap. That’s why a real comparison needs more than the bid price.

A practical lifecycle comparison looks at each option over the **same evaluation period**, often 15 to 20 years, and adds up:

- **Installed cost**, including prep, moisture work and details.
- **Routine maintenance**: cleaning chemicals, equipment, labor, and any burnishing.
- **Periodic work**: topcoat renewal, re-polishing or resealing, at the intervals the products and your traffic actually call for.
- **Repairs**: impact damage, edges, drains and joints.
- **Downtime**: lost production or sales for each planned or unplanned shutdown.

Compare floors over the same period, with every cost in it.

Dividing installed price by expected service life is a quick sanity check, but it leaves out maintenance, repairs and downtime. Those costs depend on your exposure and operations. We’re happy to build the comparison with your numbers.

Costs vary by region, project conditions and market. This paper describes cost drivers in general terms and is not a price quote.

About the author. Henry Hunt is a partner at Topcoat Services USA, a family-owned, veteran-owned commercial flooring contractor in Hyannis, Massachusetts, working across Cape Cod and New England. Topcoat self-performs resinous epoxy, urethane cement and polished concrete with its own crews and equipment. If you’re looking at competing proposals, send them over. We’ll tell you what we see.

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