

# Slating & Tiling

## TIPS 50

### fixing instructions

In the same way that women accuse men of being reluctant to stop and ask for directions when they get lost, some specifiers accuse tradesmen of rarely reading the fixing instructions that are supplied with the products that are specified.

So why do manufacturers supply instructions with some products and not others?

#### Generic

It would be ideal if all products were generic, like nails, battens, clay plain tiles or natural slate, which have been around for centuries. In that time the method of use has changed very little. The changes that have taken place have developed over time to allow one generation of slaters and tilers to pass on the techniques to the next generation. But the pace of progress gets quicker and new products are being launched onto the market every year, and we need to know how to fix and use these products, even if we have never seen them before. It is for this reason that fixing instructions are essential.

#### Proprietary

While proprietary products may be similar to another manufacturer's product, each will be unique, and will need to be explained. Therefore, it is important that the tradesman who fixes the product or system, in association with other roofing products, has the most detailed information on the fixing method that is available.

The specifier, who is more interested in size, performance and quantity, tends to have technical literature rather than fixing instructions. The fixing instructions should be clear, easy to read and illustrated. Unfortunately, some contain too many words and no illustrations, others have too much irrelevant information crammed onto a small piece of paper, while some are well thought out and cover every eventuality.

But regardless of how good, or bad the fixing instructions are, they will never address every situation. There is always need for good technical backup to allow tradesmen to

ask the manufacturer directly what should be done for those situations that are not covered by the instructions.

#### Language / instructions

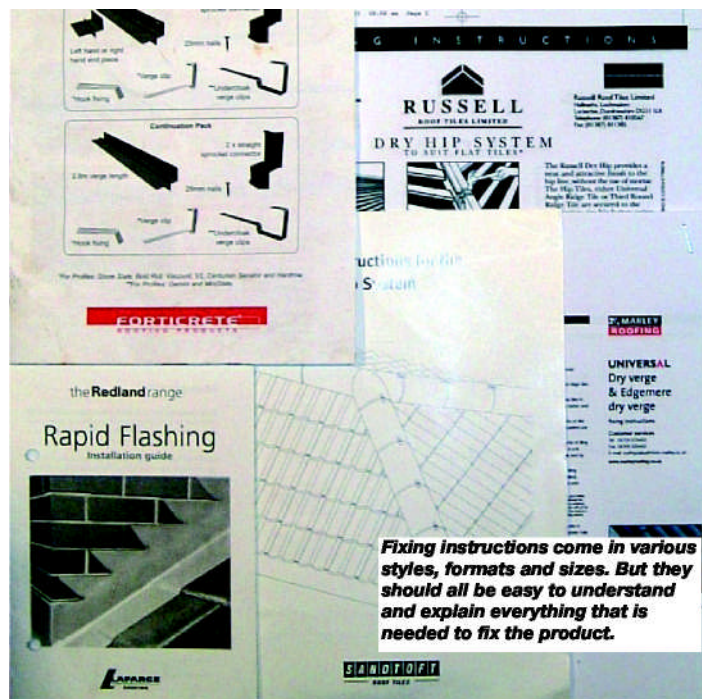
We expect all fixing instructions to be in English, but they should be in the language that the tradesman can read, and using measurements in the right format to be of use. English is not the native language of all tradesmen working in the UK, and this can be a problem where quality control and health and safety are concerned. For this reason cartoon type instructions are more universally understood. Unfortunately not everything can be explained this way.

Fixing instructions are normally included in the pack as a piece of printed paper or a small booklet, or they may be printed on the packaging. Either way there is no reason why they should not be available for even the smallest project or repair.

Having the instructions on the carton is helpful for the tradesman to read prior to opening the pack, as once opened will not be returnable if it is wrong. But unfortunately if left out in the open most packaging deteriorates and becomes unreadable. Also fixing a packaging into the A4-size property maintenance file is not convenient. The majority of companies use A4 fixing instructions that are folded into a trifold booklet, or an A5 booklet, as it is the most convenient size for most situations. The type of paper can vary from cheap photocopy paper to laminated heavy duty paper that is not affected by a shower of rain. More companies are making their fixing instructions available on their websites so they can be downloaded and read prior to the material arriving on site. This allows the preparatory work to be done correctly, often by another tradesman, such as the carpenter with the fascia board height, long before the materials arrive on site.

#### Liability / risk

There is another side to fixing instructions which should be taken into consideration. If the manufac-



turer does not supply any instructions, and the tradesman uses the product, the tradesman has to decide how to fix it. If it fails, it is the tradesman's responsibility.

This approach is not seen as being very user friendly, and repeat sales can be affected. Supplying some brief instructions is helpful and can guide the user; but if the tradesman uses the product outside of the conditions that are quoted, they are back to being responsible. If the instructions are incorrect or out of date then the manufacturer could be responsible, if the installation is undertaken in accordance with the instructions, and fails.

If, however, the instructions are complete and accurate and the installation is not undertaken in accordance with those instructions, the manufacturer is then not liable if it fails. Therefore, good fixing instructions protect the manufacturer from complaints and claims from customers. Following the instructions exactly protects the contractor and tradesman.

In most instances the instructions agree with the technical literature and specification, but occasionally they do not. In such instances the differences should be brought to the attention of the specifier as this could develop into a contractual dispute, especially if it affects another aspect of the construction. In most instances it is the

fixing instructions that are deemed to be the prime document that should be followed, but not always.

Tradesmen on site who do not read the fixing instructions are vulnerable to either invalidating any guarantee that may be provided, and may also be taking on liability for the product if it fails in use. Therefore, however tedious it is, instructions should be read and followed, and at least one copy of the instructions saved in a file in the dry, for reference both during the contract, and long after if there is a dispute.

Instructions are good if read, understood and used, but dangerous if not. In court, both sides are unlikely to be right.

#### Tips

- Always look for, read and save all instructions with proprietary products.
- If the instructions do not cover the intended situation, contact the technical/sales department of the product manufacturer to check, and report back to the specifier for a decision.
- Never guess how the product should be used – you could be wrong.
- Never be afraid to ask for directions, manufacturers prefer that their products to be used correctly rather than abused.

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