

# HINTS FOR HOMEOWNERS

## Awash in Repairs: Good Construction in Kitchen and Bath Now Prevents That Sinking Feeling Later

(NAPSA)—A sleek new countertop, state-of-the-art fixtures or the hottest Italian tile might be driving the desire to endure a kitchen or bath remodel, but the most important aspect of remodeling could lie under the surface.

Installing the right underlayment behind or below ceramic tile, homebuilding and remodeling contractors say, can prevent decidedly unattractive broken tiles, swollen walls and spongy floors down the road.

The problem, explains Ed Bielecki, a tile contractor and master plumber from the Baltimore area, is that many walls and floors are lined with products that can become saturated with water, a recipe for disaster in a kitchen, bath, laundry room or mudroom.

"In the industry, it says you can put tile on plywood or OSB [oriented strand board]," says Bielecki, a 30-year veteran of home construction. "It doesn't work. Water goes through grout and attacks plywood, making it swell."

In the 1980s, he says, some builders placed drywall between the tile and the wood. Another mistake, he says. The main component of drywall, gypsum, he explains, will eventually succumb to water saturation. Even "green board," drywall with a water-resistant paper face still used frequently in wet-area applications, is susceptible to damage.

"A lot of builders just use drywall in the shower," agrees John DuFeif, a Baltimore-area custom-



**A little moisture seeping through grout does a wall's worth of damage when tile is attached directly to green board or plywood; experts recommend fiber-cement backerboards in kitchens and bathrooms.**

home builder and remodeler. "And then they just put the tile over the drywall. I'd say 80 percent of the homes built in this country are built that way. It gets mildew and becomes soft."

A frequent alternative to gypsum products, glass-mesh cement board, may be cement based, but because of its high permeability, will resist only limited wetness, Bielecki adds.

The solution, both say, is to use a fiber-cement backerboard, behind or below the tile. Their brand of choice is Hardibacker® underlayment and backerboards, manufactured by James Hardie Building Products in thicknesses of ¼ inch and ½ inch for floors and walls, respectively.

"I feel it's superior to any other product on the market,"

DuFeif says of Hardibacker underlayment, praising it for its high density and durability. Hardibacker backerboard, for which the company recently engineered a new performance-enhancing technology for its ½-inch thick product for walls, is the number-one selling backerboard on the market.

Harold Hershey's 40-year-old home in Rockville, Md., was due for a new shower because the floor underneath the shower had succumbed to water damage.

"In time it cracked and leaked through and rotted out a floor or two," Hershey says, explaining that DuFeif's company installed a new floor, custom vinyl shower pan and tile.

Fortunately, products have improved since the days when Hershey's home was built, and DuFeif advises his customers to take advantage of the fruits of the latest building product technologies to keep their kitchens and baths stunning and looking new.

"Use the best quality materials," he says, "because once you put these materials in place and cover them up with tile or a countertop, they're there for a long time and it's very hard to take these things out once they're in."

"What's behind the tile," he sums it up, "is just as important as the tile itself."

For more information on Hardibacker ceramic tile underlayment, call 1-888-JHARDIE or visit [www.hardibacker.com](http://www.hardibacker.com).