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United States Patent Application Publication

20250263888

Kind Code

A1

Publication Date

August 21, 2025

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DUAL LAYER WET LAID NONWOVEN MAT

Abstract

A carpet tile, includes a pile fabric layer, a primary backing coupled with the pile fabric layer, a secondary backing coupled with the primary backing, and a dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat. The dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat includes a first layer comprising a plurality of glass fibers and a first binder and a second layer comprising a plurality of synthetic fibers and a second binder.

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Family ID: 1000008574858

Appl. No.: 19/191558

Filed: April 28, 2025

Related U.S. Application Data

parent US division 16431831 20190605 parent-grant-document US 12320064 child US 19191558

Publication Classification

Int. Cl.: D06N7/00 (20060101)

U.S. Cl.:

CPC D06N7/0071 (20130101); D06N7/0036 (20130101); B32B2471/02 (20130101); D06N2201/082 (20130101); D06N2209/1628 (20130101); Y10T428/23979 (20150401)

Background/Summary

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS [0001] This application is a Division of pending U.S. application Ser. No. 16/431,831 filed Jun. 5, 2019. The entire contents of the above-identified application are incorporated by reference for all purposes.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Carpet tiles offer considerable advantages over rugs or wall to wall carpeting. For example, the use of carpet tiles for floor covering provides a simple installation process and allows removal of individual tiles which have become worn or soiled more than other tiles while those tiles which are not worn or soiled may be left in place. Additionally, tiles may be rearranged or replaced to enhance decorative effects. Conventional carpet tiles include a pile fabric facing set into a layer of resilient thermoplastic (including elastomeric) material which is stiffened with a layer of suitable stiffening fibers, such as fiberglass fibers. The tile is generally backed with another layer of resilient elastomeric or thermoplastic material to which an adhesive may be applied to set the carpet tile onto the floor.

[0003] Conventional carpet tiles are manufactured using a two-layer process. In some two-layer processes, the product has to be run through a production line twice. In the first pass, a nonwoven fiberglass mat is adhered to greige goods via an extruded thermoplastic secondary backing to form a greige good/extruded backing/fiberglass composite. The greige good/extruded backing/fiberglass composite is then wound onto an A-frame roller at the end of this process. In the second pass, the composite is again coated with the same or different secondary extruded backing and an optional felt layer (such as a polyester spunbond) may be added as the finished bottom side of the carpet tile. In other two-layer processes, the product is only run through the line once. In the first pass, a plastisol coating/secondary backing is applied to greige goods before a nonwoven fiberglass mat is adhered to form a greige good/extruded backing/fiberglass composite. The greige good/extruded backing/fiberglass composite is then coated again with the plastisol coating/secondary backing (with the coating going on the uncoated top side of the fiberglass) in a downstream step. This second layer of plastisol is designed to result in complete wet out of the fiberglass mat ensuring sufficient lamination strength and to act as the finished bottom side of the carpet tile. These two-part processes are both inefficient and expensive.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] Embodiments of the present invention are directed to carpet tiles that can be produced using a single layer production process, while providing enhanced dimensional stability. Such carpet tiles not only reduce production costs and increase production efficiency by eliminating steps from the manufacturing process, but also eliminate the need for multiple secondary backing layers. The carpet tiles of the present invention achieve these results by incorporating a dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat in place of one of the secondary backing layers as well as an optional felt layer. The top layer of the nonwoven mat is formed from coarse glass fibers, while the second layer is formed from synthetic fibers and/or a combination of synthetic fibers and coarse glass fibers. The synthetic fiber layer proves a smoother, non-itchy surface that remains exposed and is easy to handle by installation personnel.

[0005] In one embodiment, a carpet tile is provided. The carpet tile may include a pile fabric layer, a primary backing coupled with the pile fabric layer, a secondary backing coupled with the primary backing, and a dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat. The dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat may include a first layer comprising a plurality of glass fibers and a first binder and a second layer comprising a plurality of synthetic fibers and a second binder.

[0006] In another embodiment, a method of installing a carpet tile is provided. The method may include providing a carpet tile. The carpet tile may include a pile fabric layer, a primary backing coupled with the pile fabric layer, a secondary backing coupled with the primary backing, and a dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat. The dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat may include a first layer comprising a plurality of glass fibers and a binder and a second layer comprising a plurality of

synthetic fibers and the binder. The method may also include providing an adhesive between an exposed surface of the second layer and a floor substrate and applying force to a top surface of the carpet tile to adhere the carpet tile to the floor substrate using the adhesive.

[0007] In another embodiment, a method of manufacturing a carpet tile is provided. The method may include providing a pile fabric layer having a primary backing and coating the primary backing with a secondary backing. The method may also include applying a dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat to an exposed surface of the secondary backing to form a carpet sheet. The dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat may include a first layer comprising a plurality of glass fibers and a binder and a second layer comprising a plurality of synthetic fibers and the binder. The first layer may be positioned toward the secondary backing. The method may further include cutting the carpet sheet into a plurality of carpet tiles.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] Various features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention will be better understood when the following detailed description is read with reference to the accompanying figures in which like characters represent like parts throughout the figures, wherein:

[0009] FIG. 1A is an isometric view of a carpet tile according to embodiments.

[0010] FIG. 1B is a side view of the carpet tile of FIG. 1A.

[0011] FIG. 2 is a schematic view of a dual layer wet-laid mat according to embodiments.

[0012] FIG. 3 is a schematic view of a manufacturing system that produces a dual layer wet-laid mat according to embodiments.

[0013] FIG. 4 is a schematic view of a manufacturing system that produces a dual layer wet-laid mat according to embodiments.

[0014] FIG. 5 is a method of forming carpet tiles using a dual layer wet-laid fiber mat according to embodiments.

[0015] FIG. 6 is a schematic view of a manufacturing system that produces a carpet tile according to embodiments.

[0016] FIG. 7 is a schematic view of a manufacturing system that produces a carpet tile according to embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0017] The ensuing description provides exemplary embodiments only, and is not intended to limit the scope, applicability, or configuration of the disclosure. Rather, the ensuing description of the exemplary embodiments will provide those skilled in the art with an enabling description for implementing one or more exemplary embodiments. It being understood that various changes may be made in the function and arrangement of elements without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims.

[0018] Embodiments of the present invention provide carpet tiles that, instead of having two separate layers of thermoplastic backing as in conventional tiles, use a single application of thermoplastic backing between the primary backing and a reinforcing mat/scrim. In such conventional applications, the mat/scrim must impart the required dimensional stability and create a suitable finished floor facing surface. Embodiments of the invention achieve the desired dimensional stability by providing a dual layer wet laid nonwoven mat in which one layer consists of a polymeric/synthetic fiber with binder and the other layer is glass fiber with a binder. The mat not only provides dimensional stability, but the polymeric/synthetic layer also acts as a finished surface for facing the floor, as the polymeric/synthetic layer is not itchy or otherwise uncomfortable to handle and therefore provides a surface that is suitable for handling during installation.

[0019] Dimensional stability is important in a carpet tile. Dimensional stability, as understood in

the art, is the ability of a carpet tile to lie flat and remain flat and square on a floor surface under conditions of normal use as described in U.S. Pat. No. 4,010,302, the entire contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference. The industry standard Aachen DIN STD 54318 test is used to determine the dimensional stability. Fiberglass mats or scrims may be placed between resilient thermoplastic backing layers to impart dimensional stability in carpet tiles.

[0020] Turning now to the figures, a carpet tile **100** according to the present invention is shown in FIG. 1A. While shown here as being square-shaped, it will be appreciated that carpet tile **100** may be cut or otherwise formed in any desired shape and can be sized to match any desired application. Additionally, the textile top layer may be formed from any fabric or other textile material to fit the needs or aesthetics of a particular application. Carpet tile **100** may include a textile top layer positioned atop one or more backing layers and a dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat having a top glass fiber layer and a bottom synthetic fiber layer. For example, as shown in FIG. 1B, carpet tile **100** may include a fabric layer **102**, such as a pile fabric layer or other fabric layer serving as an exposed top surface of the carpet tile **100**. The fabric layer **102** may be secured to a primary backing layer **104**. Primary backing layer may be made of polyester and/or polypropylene. The primary backing **104** may be secured to a secondary backing **108**, with a latex pre-coat **106** being positioned between the primary backing **104** and the secondary backing **108** in some embodiments. The secondary backing **108** may be formed from a thermoplastic elastomer and/or a plastisol material, such as polyolefins, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), and/or polyurethane.

[0021] A dual layer fiberglass mat **110** may be coupled to the secondary backing **108**. As best seen in FIG. 2, the dual layer fiberglass mat **110** may include a first layer **112** that is formed from a plurality of glass fibers that are held together using a binder and a second layer **114** that is formed from a plurality of synthetic fibers and a binder. The second layer **114** formed of synthetic fibers provides a soft, non-itchy exposed bottom surface that may be grasped by the installers. This layer helps prevent the installers from needing to directly touch an itchy glass layer. The glass fibers of the first layer **112** may have diameters of between 8 and 25 μm , between 8 and 16 μm , and more commonly between 11 and 16 μm , and in some embodiments may include a mixture of coarse fibers having an average diameter between 8 and 11 μm mixed with a second type of coarse fibers having a diameter between 12 and 25 μm . The coarse fibers may have lengths of between about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch and 2 inches. The first layer **112** may include 60-95% of glass fibers and 5-40% of binder. The second layer **114** may include 60-95% of synthetic fibers and 5-40% of binder. The synthetic fibers of the second layer **114** may be meltable or laminatable fibers such as polyester, polypropylene, nylon, polyethylene, and the like. The binder may be an acrylic type binder, such as Dow QRRP-1692 or BASF Acrodur 950L. In some embodiments, the second layer **114** may also include some percentage of glass fibers mixed in with the synthetic fibers to further increase the dimensional stability of the carpet tile **100**. In some embodiments, the first layer **112** may have a thickness of between about 0.1 mm and 1.5 mm, while the second layer **114** may have a thickness of between about 0.1 mm and 4 mm such that the mat **110** has a total thickness of between about 0.2 mm and 5.5 mm.

[0022] The dual layered fiberglass mat **110** may be formed from a wet laid process such that there is not a separate binder or adhesive used to adhere the layers to one another. For example, the nonwoven mats discussed below include multiple layers of fibers made in a single step or process. In other words, the layers of the mats discussed below are not separately formed and then combined in a later stage or process (i.e., separately made and then bonded together). Rather, the layers are formed simultaneously, which results in a mat that functions as a single layer in terms of structure and integrity despite having different fiber compositions and layer densities. Accordingly, the mats discussed may be produced at lower cost and in less time.

[0023] The first layer **112** may include a blend of differently sized glass fibers. The differently sized glass fibers form layers of different densities within the mat. For example, the top layer may include both coarse and microfibers. The coarse or larger diameter fibers may range in size

between about 8 and about 25 μm , and small diameter fibers or microfibers may range in size between about 0.5 and 6 μm . In a more specific embodiment, the coarse or larger diameter fibers may range in size between about 8 and about 16 μm , and more commonly between about 11 and 16 μm .

[0024] In a specific embodiment, the larger diameter fibers may be about 13 μm diameter fibers and the microfibers may be about 3 μm in diameter. The mat includes at least one binder that bonds the large diameter fibers and microfibers together to form the fiber mat. The binder may be water repellant and/or include a water repellant additive such as a stearylated melamine water repellant.

[0025] Typically, the first layer **112** is a non-woven fiber mat **110** formed using coarse fibers. The coarse fiber layer **112** provides dimensional stability to the finished carpet tile **100**. The term “coarse fibers” in this application is understood to mean glass fibers having an average diameter between about 8 and 25 μm and an average length between about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch and 2 inches. The coarse fibers may be made from E glass, C glass, T glass, sodium borosilicate glass, A & S glasses, Basalt, mineral wool, slag fiber, and mixtures thereof. In one particular embodiment, the first layer **112** may be formed entirely of coarse fibers having an average fiber diameter of between 8 and 25 μm , between 8 and 16 μm , and more commonly between 11 and 16 μm . In another embodiment, the first layer **112** may be formed from a combination of differently sized coarse fibers, which are typically homogenously dispersed or distributed throughout the first layer **112**. For example, the first layer **112** may be formed from a first type of coarse fibers having an average diameter between 8 and 11 μm , which is then mixed with a second type of coarse fibers having a diameter between 12 and 25 μm . In another embodiment, the first layer **112** may be formed from a combination of coarse glass fibers having fiber diameter between 8 and 25 μm and synthetic fiber having fiber diameter between 0.3 and 8 denier. For example, the percentage by weight of the coarse fibers in the second layer **112** may vary between 70 and 99 percent, while the percentage by weight of the synthetic fibers may vary between 1 and 30 percent. The inclusion of synthetic fiber may be necessary to combat the differential shrinkage characteristics between glass fiber and synthetic fiber.

[0026] In some embodiments, the second layer **114** may be formed solely out of synthetic fibers, such as polyester, polypropylene, polyethylene terephthalate (PET), and/or other synthetic materials. In another embodiment, the second layer **114** may be formed out of a combination of coarse glass fibers and synthetic fibers. When a combination of coarse fibers and synthetic fibers are employed, the coarse fibers and synthetic fibers are typically homogenously dispersed or distributed throughout the second layer **114**. In an embodiment that includes both coarse fibers and synthetic fibers, the percentage of weight of the coarse fibers and the synthetic fibers may vary. For example, the percentage by weight of the coarse fibers in the second layer **114** may vary between 1 and 80 percent, while the percentage by weight of the synthetic fibers may vary between 20 and 99 percent. In another embodiment, the percentage by weight of the coarse fibers in the second layer **114** may vary between 1 and 20 percent, while the percentage by weight of the synthetic fibers may vary between 80 and 99 percent, which would result in a mat **110** that is substantially smoother and less itchy. The inclusion of coarse fibers in the second layer **114** provides additional strength and integrity to the layer and helps increase the dimensional stability of the finished carpet tile **100**.

[0027] In embodiments where both first layer **112** and second layer **114** are produced with a combination of coarse glass fibers and synthetic fibers, the ratio of glass to synthetic fiber is distinctly different in each of the two layers.

[0028] As noted above, in some embodiments the second layer **114** may be formed entirely of synthetic fibers having an average fiber diameter of between 0.3 and 8 denier. The second layer **114** may be formed from a single, relatively uniform, synthetic fiber size or the second layer **114** may be formed from a combination of differently sized synthetic fibers, which are typically homogenously dispersed or distributed throughout the second layer **114**. For example, the second layer **114** may be formed from a first type of synthetic fibers having an average diameter between

0.3 and 1 denier, which is then mixed with a second type of synthetic fibers having an average diameter between 1.5 and 8 denier. The weight percentages of the first and second types of synthetic fibers may vary in the second layer **114**. For example, the percentage by weight of the first type of synthetic fibers may vary between 5 and 50 percent while the second type of synthetic fibers may vary between 50 and 95 percent. The percentages of the first and second types of synthetic fibers may be varied depending on a desired texture or attribute affecting the tactile feel of the resulting layer **114**. For example, if the layer **114** needs to be smooth, the layer **114** will contain a higher percentage of the smaller synthetic fibers.

[0029] The mat **110** includes a binder that binds the respective fibers together in the first layer **112** and in the second layer **114** and that also bonds the first layer **112** and the second layer **114** together. In one embodiment, the mat **110** includes a single binder that functions to both bind the fibers together in the respective layers and bond the respective layers together. The binder is typically homogenously or relatively evenly dispersed or distributed throughout the mat **110**. Stated differently, the binder may be distributed homogenously within the first layer **112** and the second layer **114** and may also be homogenously distributed through the first and second layers **112**, **114**. Since the binder is relatively evenly distributed through the mat **110** in this manner, the mat **110** does not include a separate binder, or a layer of binder (or other adhesive), at an interface between the first layer **112** and the second layer **114**. Stated differently, there is not a concentration of a binder at an interface or boundary between the first and second layers **112**, **114** since the binder is evenly distributed through the mat **110**. This even distribution of the binder results from the formation of the first and second layers **112**, **114** in a single step. In addition, the fibers of the first and second layers **112**, **114** are more integrated, intertwined, and intermeshed with one another at the interface or boundary of the layers due to the formation of the layers in a single step. This results in more gradual transition between the first and second layers **112**, **114**.

[0030] The binder is uniformly or homogenously distributed throughout the top and bottom layers and there is no binder concentration at the interface. In addition, because the two layers were formed simultaneously, a small gradient of glass and synthetic fibers exists at the interface, which enhances the physical bond or entanglement of the fibers of the top and bottom layers. Specifically, a portion of the synthetic fibers of the second layer **114** at or near the interface migrate into the first layer **112** and vice versa. The degree of migration of the fibers and the resulting physical bond or entanglement is unique to the mats formed in accordance with the disclosure herein since such entanglement and migration is not achievable without simultaneously forming the layers. The migration of the fibers is a desirable feature since it makes the interface between the layers gradual, which may allow the secondary backing **108** to partially penetrate into the second layer **114**. The migration of the fibers also forms a strong bond between the layers.

[0031] In some embodiments, the mat **110** may have a combined thickness between about 0.1 and 1.5 mm. In some embodiments, the thickness of the mat **110** may be less than 20 percent of an overall thickness of the carpet tile **100**. The first and second layers have respective thicknesses. For example, the thickness of the first layer **112** may be between 0.05 mm and 0.5 mm, and the thickness of the second layer **114** may be between 0.05 mm and 1 mm. Each of these layers **112**, **114** may also be defined as a percentage of the overall mat thickness. For example, the first layer **112** may be between 10% and 70% of the overall mat thickness, and the second layer **114** may be between 30% and 90% percent of the overall mat thickness.

[0032] In some embodiments, the thickness of the first layer **112** may be greater than the thickness of the second layer **114** because the first layer **112** may include more coarse fibers. Furthermore, because the first layer **112** includes coarse fibers the porosity of the first layer **112** may be greater than the second layer **114**. The more porous first layer **112** enables the first layer **112** to absorb a portion of the secondary backing **108** when the mat **110** is applied as a mat to the secondary backing **108**, such as by lamination, during manufacturing of the carpet tile **100**. Specifically, the secondary backing **108** may be relatively wet or unhardened and may absorb or penetrate into the

first layer **112** due to the porosity of the first layer **112**. The penetration or absorption of the secondary backing **108** into the first layer **112** may bind the secondary backing **108** to the mat **110** during manufacturing. The second layer **114** may be less porous than the first layer and may prevent the coarse fibers of the first layer **112** from being exposed in order to provide a smoother, non-scratchy exposed bottom surface for the carpet tile **100**.

[0033] FIG. **3** is a schematic view of a manufacturing system **300** that produces a mat **110**. In operation, the manufacturing system **300** is able to produce a multilayered mat in a single step/process. That is the layers of the mat are not separately formed and then combined at a later stage or process (i.e., separately made and then bonded together). The mats **110** produced by the manufacturing system **300** may therefore be produced at lower cost and in less time.

[0034] The manufacturing system **300** includes multiple fluid lines that deliver coarse fibers and synthetic fibers to a hydroformer **302** that simultaneously forms the first and second layers **112**, **114** of the mat **110**. While a hydroformer **302** is illustrated, a fourdrinier wire or a delta former may also be used to produce first and second layers **112**, **114** of the mat **110** in a single step/process.

[0035] The manufacturing system **300** produces the first layer **112** using a first fluid line **304** that delivers coarse fiber to the hydroformer. The first fluid line **304** includes at least one coarse fiber source **306** containing one or more types of coarse fibers (e.g., differently sized coarse fibers, coarse fibers made from different materials, or a combination thereof). Fluidly coupled to the coarse fiber source **306** is a pump **308** (e.g., a thick stock pump) that pumps a first fluid **310** containing the coarse fibers. For example, the first fluid **310** may include water, viscosity modifiers, dispersants, defoamers, etc. mixed with the coarse fibers. After passing through the pump **308**, the first fluid **310** is diluted with a dilution fluid **312** (e.g., water, viscosity modifiers, dispersants, defoamers, or a combination thereof) stored in a dilution tank **314**. By diluting the coarse fibers, the manufacturing system **300** may enable a more even distribution of the coarse fibers in the first layer **112** by the hydroformer. The dilution fluid **312** combines with the first fluid **310** before the first fluid **310** enters a second pump **316**. The pump **316** (e.g., thin stock pump) may facilitate mixing of the first fluid **310** and the dilution fluid **312** before delivery to the hydroformer **302**. After exiting the pump **316**, the first fluid **310** enters a first inlet pipe **318** of the hydroformer **302**. The first inlet pipe **318** directs the first fluid **310** into the hydroformer **302**, which forms the first layer **112** of the mat **110** by removing the first fluid **310** and dilution fluid **312** from the fluid/coarse fiber mixture as the mixture is poured onto the hydroformer **302**.

[0036] In order to form the second layer **114** of the mat **110**, the manufacturing system **300** includes a second fluid line **320**. The second fluid line **320** includes at least one synthetic fiber source **306** containing one or more types of synthetic fibers (e.g., differently sized synthetic fibers, synthetic fibers made from different materials, or a combination thereof). Fluidly coupled to the synthetic fibers source **306** is a pump **322** (e.g., a thick stock pump) that pumps a second fluid **324** containing the synthetic fibers. For example, the second fluid **324** may include water, viscosity modifiers, dispersants, defoamers, etc. mixed with the synthetic fibers. After passing through the pump **322**, the second fluid **324** is diluted with a dilution fluid **326** (e.g., water, viscosity modifiers, dispersants, defoamers, or a combination thereof) stored in a dilution tank **328**. By diluting the second fluid **324**, the manufacturing system **300** may enable even distribution of the fibers in the second layer **114**. The dilution fluid **326** combines with the second fluid **324** before the second fluid **324** enters a second pump **330**. The pump **330** (e.g., thin stock pump) enables mixing of the second fluid **324** and the dilution fluid **326** before delivery to the hydroformer **302**. After exiting the pump **330**, the second fluid **324** enters a second inlet pipe **332** of the hydroformer **302**. The second inlet pipe **332** directs the second fluid **324** into the hydroformer **302**, which forms the second layer **114** of the mat **110** by removing the second fluid **324** and dilution fluid **326** from the fluid/fiber mixture as the mixture is poured onto the hydroformer **302** atop the first layer of the mat **110** that was immediately formed by the hydroformer **302**. The second fluid **324** is directed or poured atop the first layer of the mat **110** as the fluid is being drained from the first fluid **310** such

that the second layer **114** and the first layer **112** are formed simultaneously by the hydroformer **302**. [0037] In some embodiments, fluidly coupled to the second fluid line **320** is a third fluid line **334**. The third fluid line **334** includes at least one coarse fiber source **336** containing one or more types of coarse fibers (e.g., differently sized coarse fibers, coarse fibers made from different materials, or a combination thereof). Fluidly coupled to the coarse fiber source **336** is a pump **338** (e.g., a stock pump) that pumps a third fluid **340** containing the coarse fibers. The third fluid **340** may include water, viscosity modifiers, dispersants, defoamers, etc. mixed with the coarse fibers. After passing through the pump **338**, the third fluid **340** may be pumped into the second fluid line **320**. In this way, coarse fibers may be mixed with synthetic fibers of the second layer **114**. As illustrated, the third fluid line **334** couples upstream from the pump **330**. By coupling upstream from the pump **330**, the manufacturing system **300** uses the turbulent flow through the pump **330** to facilitate mixing of the third fluid **340** with the second fluid **324**. However, in some embodiments, the third fluid line **334** may couple to the second fluid line **320** downstream from the pump **330**. For example, the manufacturing system **300** may rely on the pump **330** to mix the third fluid **340** with the second fluid **324**. In still other embodiments, the third fluid line **340** may couple upstream as well as downstream of the pump **330**. This layout may enable the gradual introduction of the third fluid into the first and/or second fluid lines at different locations.

[0038] The flow of the first, second, and third fluids **310**, **324**, **340** through the manufacturing system **300** may be controlled with a controller **342**. The controller **342** may include one or more processors **344** that execute instructions stored on one or more memories **346** to control the operation of various valves as well as the pumps. For example, the third fluid line **334** may include first and second valves **348**, **350**. As illustrated, the first valve **348** controls the flow of the third fluid **340** into the first fluid line **304**, while the second valve **350** controls the flow of the third fluid **340** into the second fluid line **320**. By controlling the first and second valves **348**, **350** the controller **342** is able to control the amount of the third fluid **340** combining with the second fluid **324**. This in turn controls the amount of coarse fibers in the second layer **114** produced in the hydroformer **302**. In this way, the manufacturing system **300** may vary the coarse fiber content in the second layer **114** to between 0 and 100 percent, and more commonly to the percentages described in the mat embodiments herein.

[0039] The manufacturing system **300** may also control the fluid flow through the first and second fluid lines **304**, **320** using additional valves **352** and **354** as well as controlling the pumps **308**, **318**, **322**, **330**, and **338**. By controlling the flow of the first and second fluids **310**, **324** the controller **342** may increase or decrease thickness of the respective first and second layers **112**, **114**. Stated differently, the manufacturing system **300** may increase or decrease the thickness of the first and/or second layers **112**, **114** of the mat **110** depending on the particular needs of the carpet tile **100**. For example, the manufacturing system **300** may increase the flow of the first fluid **310** through the fluid line **304** to increase the thickness of the first layer **112** and decrease the flow of the second fluid **324** to decrease the thickness of the second layer **114**. Similarly, the manufacturing system **300** may decrease the flow of the first fluid **310** through the fluid line **304** to decrease the thickness of the first layer **112** and increase the flow of the second fluid **324** to increase the thickness of the second layer **114**.

[0040] As the first and second fluids **310**, **324** enter the hydroformer **302** they contact a conveyer belt **356** that drains a substantially majority of the fluid in the first and second fluids **310**, **324** leaving behind the combined first and second layers **112**, **114**. The manufacturing system **300** may then apply one or more binders **358**. In some embodiments, the binder **358** may include resinous binders such as urea formaldehyde, modified urea formaldehyde, acrylic resins, modified acrylic resins, polyurethanes, polyvinyl chlorides, melamine resins, homopolymers or copolymers of polyacrylic acid; crosslinking acrylic copolymers; cross-linked vinyl chloride acrylate copolymer, among other types of binders. Flame retardants may also be included in the binder, such as Alumina trihydrate, organic phosphonates, Antimony oxide, and the like.

[0041] These binders **358** may be stored in one or more binder sources **360**. The binder(s) **358** may be applied to the first and second layers **112**, **114** by moving the first and second layers **112**, **114** under a spray or waterfall of binder. Any excess binder may then flow through the first and second layers. In this way, the manufacturing system **300** may bind the fibers in their respective layers as well as bind the layers **112**, **114** together without performing multiple binding steps/processes. Stated differently, the manufacturing system **300** may simultaneously bind the fibers in the respective layers and bond the fibers layers together in a single step. The application of the binder(s) **358** to the first and second layers **112**, **114** simultaneously results in the binder being relatively evenly distributed through and between the first and second layers **112**, **114** without forming or defining a binder layer between the first and second layers **112**, **114**. Stated differently, a separate or individual layer of binder is not formed or defined at an interface or boundary between the first and second layers **112**, **114** as occurs in conventional systems where the layers are formed individually and combined in a subsequent process. The relatively even distribution of the binder(s) **358** may increase the strength of the mat and/or reduce issues such as delamination of the layers. In addition, the mat described herein has a less defined boundary between the first and second layers **112**, **114** since these layers are simultaneously formed. Rather, the mat has a relatively gradual transition from the first layer **112** to the second layer **114** due to the simultaneous formation of the layers, which may increase the strength and/or reduce issues such as delamination of the layers.

[0042] For convenience in describing the various embodiments herein, the coarse fibers were referred to as glass fibers. It should be realized that various other fiber types may be used in any of the embodiments described herein and that the embodiments are not limited solely to glass fibers unless otherwise specified in the claims. It should also be realized that the use of non-glass fibers are contemplated as being used in any of the embodiments. The non-glass fibers may be used in combination with glass fibers or instead of glass fibers. Accordingly, unless otherwise explicitly specified in the claims, the concepts and embodiments described herein may include only glass fibers, only non-glass fibers, or any combination of glass and non-glass fibers. Exemplary non-glass fibers include inorganic fibers, mineral fibers, basalt fibers, polymer fibers, synthetic fibers, organic fibers, natural fibers, and the like. Similarly, it should be understood that the glass microfibers and/or glass coarse fibers described herein can be partially or completely replaced with polymeric, synthetic, or natural microfibers. Thus, the general term “fibers” and/or “coarse fibers” may be used in the claims with such usage being understood to cover a variety of fibers including glass fibers and non-glass fibers. The term “coarse fibers” will be understood in relation to size to have the definitions provided herein.

[0043] Referring now to FIG. **4**, illustrated is a method **400** of forming a fiber mat. In a specific embodiment, the fiber mat may be a glass mat **110** for a carpet tile, such as carpet tile **100** described herein. At block **402**, a first fluid mixture is poured or applied onto a porous belt or surface. The first fluid mixture includes a first group of fibers that are homogeneously mixed or dispersed within a first fluid. In a specific embodiment, the first group of fibers comprise or consist of coarse glass fibers having an average fiber diameter of between 8 μm and 25 μm . When the first fluid mixture is applied or poured atop the porous belt or surface, the first fluid is drained or removed from the first fluid mixture so that a layer of the first group of fibers is formed atop the porous belt or surface. In some embodiments a vacuum may be applied to the porous belt or surface to facilitate in removal of the first fluid from the first fluid mixture.

[0044] At block **404**, a second fluid mixture is poured or applied onto the porous belt or surface atop the layer of the first group of fibers. The second fluid mixture includes a second group of fibers that are homogeneously mixed or dispersed within a second fluid. In one specific embodiment, the second group of fibers comprise or consist of synthetic fibers having an average fiber diameter of between about 0.3 and 8 denier. In another specific embodiment, the second group of fibers comprise or consist of a combination of coarse glass fibers having an average fiber diameter of between 8 μm and 25 μm and synthetic fibers having an average fiber diameter of

between 0.3 and 8 denier. The amount of each fiber type may be similar to the embodiments described herein.

[0045] When the second fluid mixture is applied or poured atop the porous belt or surface, the second fluid is drained or removed from the second fluid mixture so that a layer of the second group of fibers is formed atop the porous belt or surface and atop the layer of the first group of fibers. The second fluid mixture is poured or applied onto the porous belt or surface as the first fluid is being removed from the first fluid mixture. As such, the layer of the first group of fibers is typically not fully formed or defined until after the second fluid mixture is poured or applied onto the porous belt or surface. In this manner, the layer of the first group of fibers and the layer of the second group of fibers are formed simultaneously atop the porous belt or surface. The second fluid mixture may be poured directly vertically above the first fluid layer and thus, both layers may be poured simultaneously atop each other. Stated differently, since the layer of the first group of fibers is not fully formed or defined until after the second fluid mixture is poured or applied onto the porous belt or surface, the layer of the first group of fibers is formed or defined at essentially the same time as the layer of the second group of fibers is formed or defined atop of the porous belt or surface. Since the layer of the first group of fibers and the layer of the second group of fibers are formed simultaneously, the degree of intermeshing or entangling of the fibers at the interface of the two layers is significantly greater than in conventional fiber mats where one or both of the layers are fully formed or defined prior to application of the other layer. In some embodiments, the second fluid mixture may be poured or applied onto the porous belt or surface within 30 inches of where the first fluid mixture is poured or applied onto the porous belt or surface. In such instances, the fiber mat forming section (i.e., porous belt) may be extremely long such that the first layer is still dewatering when the second fluid mixture is applied to the belt.

[0046] In other instances, the second layer may be poured within 12 inches or within 6 inches after the first layer is poured or applied to the porous belt. In such instances, the first layer may be partially dewatered, but still in the process of forming on the porous belt. In some embodiments, the second layer **114** (e.g., a more dense layer) may be poured atop the porous belt first and then the first layer **112** (e.g., a less dense layer) may be poured atop the second layer **114**. In such instances, a more dense layer may be formed on the bottom while a less dense layer is simultaneously formed on the top.

[0047] At block **406**, a binder is simultaneously applied to the layer of the first group of fibers and the layer of the second group of fibers in order to bind the two layers together and to bind the various fibers within each layer together. In most embodiments, a binder is not applied to either layer prior to block **406**, or stated differently, the layers are typically free of a binder prior to block **406**. The simultaneous application of the binder to the two layers, which are typically free of a binder prior to block **406**, results in a more homogenous or uniform distribution of the binder throughout the fiber mat. In addition, the simultaneous application of the binder to the two layer results in the fiber mat being free of a concentrated binder layer at the interface of the two layers. Conventional fiber mats typically include a binder concentration at the interface between layers because the fiber layers are formed separately and then adhered or bonded together via an additional binder or other adhesive. The additional binder bonds the two layers together and is typically concentrated at the interface between the two layers. In contrast, the process described herein is able to form a multiple layer fiber mat construction in which the binder is relatively homogeneously or uniformly dispersed throughout the mat rather than being concentrated in one or more areas. In addition, a single binder may be employed to both bond or adhere the layers together and bond or adhere the fibers of the various layers together. Conventional mats commonly require the use of multiple binders in order to bond the fibers of the separate layers together and to subsequently bond the layers together.

[0048] In a specific embodiment, the fiber mat that is formed according to the method **400** of FIG. **4** may be a mat for a carpet tile, such as carpet tile **100**. In such embodiments, the mat may be

applied to the secondary backing during formation of the carpet tile. The layer of the first group of fibers may be capable of absorbing a material of the carpet tile, such as the secondary backing, when the mat is positioned against the secondary backing during formation of the carpet tile. In some embodiments, the layer of the second group of fibers may partially absorb the material of the secondary backing, but may block the material from passing or absorbing through the mat to an exterior surface of the second layer. In this manner, the mat may be adhered or bonded with the secondary backing due to the absorption of the secondary backing material within the mat, but the material may not be visible on the exterior surface.

[0049] It should be noted that while the method **400** of FIG. **4** is described as simultaneously forming two layers, the method **400** could be employed to simultaneously form three or more layers as described. For example, block **404** could be repeated with a third fluid mixture, a fourth fluid mixture, and the like to form additional layers atop the layer of the second group of fibers. The binder could then be simultaneously applied to each of the layers at block **406** as desired. Thus, the method **400** of FIG. **4** is not limited to two layer constructions.

[0050] FIG. **5** depicts a single-pass manufacturing system **500** for manufacturing a carpet tile, such as carpet tile **100**, in accordance with the present invention. System **200** includes a greige goods source **502** that supplies a fabric layer **102**, such as a pile fabric (or other suitable fabric for carpet applications) having a primary backing **104**. This fabric layer **102** may be passed through a roller assembly **504** being passed through an extruder **506**. The extruder **506** may extrude or otherwise supply a thermoplastic or plastisol material that serves as a secondary backing **108** to the fabric layer **102**. In some embodiments, prior to passing through the extruder **506**, the fabric layer **102** is coated with a latex pre-coat **106**, which may help strengthen the bond between the carpet yarns with the primary backing **104**. A nonwoven mat source **508** is provided downstream of the extruder **506** and supplies a dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat **110** against the extruded secondary backing **108**.

[0051] The mat **110** may be produced separately using manufacturing system **300** and/or process **400** as described above and may include a top layer **112** of coarse glass fibers and a bottom layer **114** of synthetic fibers, and in some embodiments a combination of synthetic fibers and coarse glass fibers. The top layer **112** may be positioned against the secondary backing **108**. In some embodiments, the secondary backing **108** is thermoplastic in nature. The fabric layer **102**, primary backing **104**, secondary backing **108**, and nonwoven mat **110** (and latex pre-coat **106** when included) may then pass through a second roller assembly, such as a nip chill roller assembly **510**, which may press the respective layers together and cause the layers to bond and set with one another due to the lower temperature of the chill rollers of the nip chill roller assembly **510**. In some embodiments, the secondary backing layer **108** is plastisol in nature. The fabric layer **102**, primary backing **104**, plastisol secondary backing **108**, and nonwoven mat **110** (and latex pre-coat **106** when included) may then pass through a set of heated ovens to cure the plastisol and bond the different layers to one another. Once cooled/cured, the various layers form a roll and/or sheet of carpet **512**, which may be provided to a cutting apparatus **514**, which cuts the carpet **512** into individual carpet tiles **100**. In some embodiments, prior to or after cutting the tiles an adhesive layer, such as a pressure sensitive adhesive layer, may be applied to the exposed bottom surface of the carpet tile **100**, oftentimes along with a non-stick release liner.

[0052] FIG. **6** depicts a single-pass process **600** for manufacturing a carpet tile, such as carpet tile **100**, in accordance with the present invention. Process **600** begins at block **602** by coating greige goods with a thermoplastic/plastisol secondary backing. In some embodiments, the greige goods may be provided in the form of a pile fabric layer having a primary backing. For example, the primary backing may be a polyester, a polypropylene woven, and/or a nonwoven fabric. A thermoplastic/plastisol secondary backing may be applied to the greige goods by extruding a thermoplastic/plastisol material onto the primary backing of the greige goods at block **604**. At block **606**, a dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat may be applied to an exposed surface of the

secondary backing to form a carpet sheet. For example, the mat may be laminated to the secondary backing material. In some embodiments, the first layer may be laminated to the secondary backing using a latex pre-coat. The dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat may be similar to the wet-laid nonwoven mat **110** described above. For example, the mat may include a first layer having a plurality of glass fibers and a binder and a second layer having a plurality of synthetic fibers and a binder. The binders are typically the same and are applied at the same time in a wet laid manufacturing process as described in accordance with FIGS. **3** and **4**. The first layer of the wet-laid nonwoven mat may be positioned facing the secondary backing, and in many embodiments, may be positioned directly adjacent the secondary backing. However, it will be appreciated that in some embodiments, one or more additional layers such as scrims, etc. may be positioned between the first layer of the wet-laid nonwoven mat and the secondary backing. Process **600** may also include cutting the carpet sheet into a plurality of carpet tiles at block **608**. Prior to being cut, the carpet sheet may be passed through one or more rollers, such as a nip chill roller assembly to set the adhesives to secure the various layers of the carpet sheet to one another.

[0053] In some embodiments, process **600** may include applying an adhesive to the exposed bottom surface of the second layer. The adhesive may be applied before or after the carpet sheet has been cut into individual carpet tiles. In some embodiments, the adhesive may be a pressure sensitive adhesive that enables the carpet tile to be installed by applying force to a top surface of the carpet tile once the tile is in its desired position on a floor substrate. In some embodiments, a release liner may be applied to the exposed surface of the adhesive to prevent the adhesive from adhering to another surface prior to installation of the carpet tile. During installation, the release liner may be peeled off to expose the adhesive.

[0054] FIG. **7** depicts a process for manufacturing a carpet tile, such as carpet tile **100**, in accordance with the present invention. Process **700** begins at block **702** by providing a carpet tile, such as carpet tile **100** described herein. For example, the carpet tile may include a pile fabric layer, a primary backing coupled with the pile fabric layer, a secondary backing coupled with the primary backing, and a dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat. The dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat may include a first layer having a plurality of glass fibers and a first binder and a second layer having a plurality of synthetic fibers and a second binder. Process **700** may involve providing an adhesive between an exposed surface of the second layer and a floor substrate at block **704**. For example, the adhesive may be applied to the floor substrate just prior to placing the carpet tile against the floor substrate. In other embodiments, the adhesive is applied to the second layer prior to placing the carpet tile against the floor substrate. In some embodiments, this may be done during the installation process, while in other embodiments the adhesive may be applied to the carpet tile during the manufacturing process. For example, a pressure sensitive adhesive may be applied to the second layer with a release liner covering the exposed surface of the adhesive. During installation the release liner may be removed from the carpet tile to expose the pressure sensitive adhesive prior to positioning the carpet tile. At block **706**, force is applied to a top surface of the carpet tile to adhere the carpet tile to the floor substrate using the adhesive.

[0055] While several embodiments and arrangements of various components are described herein, it should be understood that the various components and/or combination of components described in the various embodiments may be modified, rearranged, changed, adjusted, and the like. For example, the arrangement of components in any of the described embodiments may be adjusted or rearranged and/or the various described components may be employed in any of the embodiments in which they are not currently described or employed. As such, it should be realized that the various embodiments are not limited to the specific arrangement and/or component structures described herein.

[0056] In addition, it is to be understood that any workable combination of the features and elements disclosed herein is also considered to be disclosed. Additionally, any time a feature is not discussed with regard in an embodiment in this disclosure, a person of skill in the art is hereby put

on notice that some embodiments of the invention may implicitly and specifically exclude such features, thereby providing support for negative claim limitations.

[0057] Having described several embodiments, it will be recognized by those of skill in the art that various modifications, alternative constructions, and equivalents may be used without departing from the spirit of the invention. Additionally, a number of well-known processes and elements have not been described in order to avoid unnecessarily obscuring the present invention. Accordingly, the above description should not be taken as limiting the scope of the invention.

[0058] Where a range of values is provided, it is understood that each intervening value, to the tenth of the unit of the lower limit unless the context clearly dictates otherwise, between the upper and lower limits of that range is also specifically disclosed. Each smaller range between any stated value or intervening value in a stated range and any other stated or intervening value in that stated range is encompassed. The upper and lower limits of these smaller ranges may independently be included or excluded in the range, and each range where either, neither or both limits are included in the smaller ranges is also encompassed within the invention, subject to any specifically excluded limit in the stated range. Where the stated range includes one or both of the limits, ranges excluding either or both of those included limits are also included.

[0059] As used herein and in the appended claims, the singular forms “a”, “an”, and “the” include plural referents unless the context clearly dictates otherwise. Thus, for example, reference to “a process” includes a plurality of such processes and reference to “the device” includes reference to one or more devices and equivalents thereof known to those skilled in the art, and so forth.

[0060] Also, the words “comprise,” “comprising,” “include,” “including,” and “includes” when used in this specification and in the following claims are intended to specify the presence of stated features, integers, components, or steps, but they do not preclude the presence or addition of one or more other features, integers, components, steps, acts, or groups.

Claims

1. A method of manufacturing a carpet tile, comprising: providing a pile fabric layer having a primary backing; coating the primary backing with a secondary backing; applying a dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat to an exposed surface of the secondary backing to form a carpet sheet, the dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat comprising: a first layer comprising a plurality of glass fibers and a binder; and a second layer comprising a plurality of synthetic fibers and the binder, wherein the first layer is positioned toward the secondary backing; and cutting the carpet sheet into a plurality of carpet tiles.
2. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: applying the dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat comprises laminating the first layer to the secondary backing using a latex pre-coat.
3. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: coating the primary backing with the secondary backing comprises extruding a thermoplastic material or a plastisol material onto the primary backing.
4. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, further comprising: applying a pressure sensitive adhesive to the second layer; and applying a release liner to the pressure sensitive adhesive.
5. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, further comprising: exposing the carpet sheet to a chilled roller assembly prior to cutting the carpet sheet.
6. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: the binder of the dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat is distributed homogenously throughout the dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat.
7. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, further comprising: forming the dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat by: applying the plurality of glass fibers to a surface to form the first layer; applying the plurality of synthetic fibers atop the plurality of glass fibers to form the second layer; and applying the binder to the first layer and the second layer to bind fibers within each layer to

one another and to bind the first layer and the second layer together.

8. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 7, wherein: applying the plurality of glass fibers to the surface comprises applying a first fluid mixture atop the surface, the first fluid mixture comprising the plurality of glass fibers and a first fluid; applying the plurality of synthetic fibers atop the plurality of glass fibers comprises applying a second fluid mixture atop the plurality of glass fibers, the second fluid mixture comprising the plurality of glass fibers and a second fluid; and the method further comprises draining the first fluid and the second fluid prior to applying the binder.

9. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, further comprising: coating the pile fabric layer with a latex pre-coat.

10. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: the secondary backing comprises a thermoplastic material; and applying the dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat to the exposed surface of the secondary backing comprises passing the pile fabric layer, the primary backing, the secondary backing, and the dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat through a chilled roller assembly.

11. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: the secondary backing comprises a plastisol material; and applying the dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat to the exposed surface of the secondary backing comprises passing the pile fabric layer, the primary backing, the secondary backing, and the dual-layer wet-laid nonwoven mat through a heating oven.

12. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: the second layer further comprises a plurality of coarse glass fibers.

13. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: the second layer comprises only the plurality of synthetic fibers and the binder.

14. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: the binder adheres the plurality of glass fibers within the first layer together, adheres the plurality of synthetic fibers in the second layer together, and adheres the first layer and the second layer together.

15. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: the binder comprises at least one of urea formaldehyde, modified urea formaldehyde, an acrylic resin, a modified acrylic resin, a polyurethane, a polyvinyl chloride, a melamine resin, a homopolymer or copolymer of polyacrylic acid, a crosslinking acrylic copolymer, or a cross-linked vinyl chloride acrylate copolymer.

16. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: the plurality of glass fibers comprise coarse glass fibers having an average fiber diameter between about 8 and 25 μm .

17. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 16, wherein: the plurality of glass fibers comprise glass microfibers having an average fiber diameter between about 0.5 and 6 μm .

18. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: the plurality of synthetic fibers comprise one or more of polyester, polyolefin, or nylon.

19. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: the plurality of synthetic fibers comprise a first type of synthetic fibers having an average denier of between 0.3 and 1 denier and a second type of synthetic fibers having an average denier of between 1.5 and 8 denier.

20. The method of manufacturing a carpet tile of claim 1, wherein: a percentage by weight of the synthetic fibers in the second layer is between 80 and 99 percent.
