

Cracked or Broken Ceramic Tile, What to Do?

First, it doesn't hurt ceramic tile or grout to get it wet, which is why we use it in wet spaces, e.g., shower & tub surrounds, in the first place. So, **it is not necessary to dry ceramic tile, grout, or cement board or concrete that may be underneath it.** *See *Getting Educated Article – Ceramic Tile and Why I Don't Care if It's Wet!*

The most common reasons for cracked or broken tile is ground movement (called reflective cracks) and installation issues.

*See *Tile Council of North America, Inc. (TCNA) article - Cracked Tile: Common Causes & Misconceptions*

As we track number of cracked tile & grout issues we have seen 20x more issues in Southern California than any other state, why is that? You got it, that is where we see more ground movement and settling of foundations due to underground tectonic movement and fault lines! Also, there are guidelines for ceramic tile installation that are dictated by the ANSI A108 series and the TCNA Handbook. **These standards require specific substrate preparation, bonding, and crack-isolation procedures to ensure structural integrity and prevent failure.** Too many times, the tile installer doesn't properly prepare the substrate or allows the adhesive to "skin" over before installing the tile, only spot bonds the tiles, or doesn't allow the

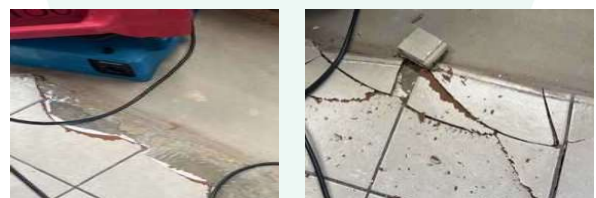
adhesive to cure long enough before installing the grout or walking on the tile, thus causing the tile to debond or crack eventually.



So, when you find cracked tile or grout identify the following:

1 Was the cracked tile or grout a pre-existing issue? Provide time & GPS stamped photos of any pre-existing conditions. The broken or loose tiles still need to be removed so the substrate can be dried, but it needs to be discussed ahead of time that this may be a pre-existing issue that may not be covered by homeowner's insurance. *Consult insurance adjuster and Do NOT give insurance advice!

2 Was the cracked tile or grout caused by a contractor performing demolition of a materials, e.g., base cabinet, baseboard, transition strip, etc., next to the tile? Look for chips or broken tiles along the edges of where the material was removed. The contractor could be responsible for the cracked or chipped tile if they didn't discuss the potential for chipping or cracking prior to removal of the material.



3

Another situation may be the tile is grouted tightly up against an MDF baseboard or particleboard base cabinet that needs to be removed due to loss of structural integrity e.g., swelling from water exposure, and it is very difficult to remove the cabinet or baseboard without chipping or cracking the tile. This needs to be discussed ahead of time and a disclaimer may need to be obtained prior to removing the wet material and potentially cracking or chipping the tile.



Tile grouted up to baseboard causing it to be difficult to remove without cracking the tile.



Slab leak under ceramic tile

In summary, when you find cracked, chipped or broken tiles it is a critical thinking exercise, so you need to ask questions and take overview & closeup photos to show the issues and then **call "Time Out"** to discuss options with materially interested parties before proceeding.



4

I always tell my students that there are always exceptions we need to be aware of and in the case of cracked tile or grout there could exist a situation where the water may have caused the tile or grout to loosen or crack but it is typically from slow leaks in a concrete foundation that saturated the adhesive under the tile for an extended amount of time and caused it to eventually loosen, thus allowing the tile to crack or separate from the substrate.

Happy Drying! Ed

MEET ED

Instructor Ed Jones has more than 30 years of experience in the industry, has the title of Master Water Restorer, is an Institute of Inspection Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC)-approved instructor, and has served on the S500-2021 consensus body committee to develop the most recent standard.

