

PLASTIC SHRINKAGE

Advisory notice

What is plastic shrinkage?

Plastic shrinkage cracks appear on the surface of a freshly placed concrete slab sometimes during or soon after finishing. These are usually parallel to each other in the order of 1 to 3 feet (300-900mm) apart and only run 1 - 2 inches (25 - 50mm) in depth; rarely do they intersect with the perimeter of the slab. These cracks rarely impair the strength of the finished slab but nevertheless are unsightly. These can be minimized if appropriate measures are taken prior to and during construction.

Why do plastic shrinkage cracks occur?

These occur when the evaporation of the surface moisture exceeds the rate at which rising "bleed" water can replace it as the surface of the slab dries. If the surface sets before sufficient tensile strength has developed small cracks may develop during setting or even after. This can be resisted by the use of Plastic which will resist any tension when the concrete is weak during initial curing. High evaporation of water occurs in low humidity, high wind speed and when concrete is warmer than surrounding air. Increased cement content can increase plastic cracking. This is down to two factors: reduced bleeding and higher tensile forces in surface.

How to minimise plastic shrinkage cracks

Prepare ahead of pour, weather check, equipment and materials make sure you have enough manpower to finish pour promptly dampen the sub grade and forms ‘

Use a vapour barrier between slab and sub grade

- Cover slab with dampened burlap or sheet
 - Apply curing agents (retarder) as soon as possible
 - Use synthetic fibres to protect against cracking
 - Windbreaks or shade, during windy or hot weather.
- Prevent excessive surface water evaporation.