Carpet takes on a ‘green’ pattern

A US manufacturer plans to revolutionise an industry that wastes energy and resources, writes Caspar Henderson

Few people would consider starting a business based on reducing environmental impact. But that is exactly what Interface, a US company that is the world's largest manufacturer of carpet tiles, has done.

In an ever more crowded world where there are increasing pressures on the environment, any business that seeks to improve its environmental footprint is likely to see rewards.

Interface has come up with a product called Solution Dyed PET, which is designed to utilise the basic properties of carpeting and hard floors. The product, launched last July, uses a process that reduces material waste and emissions, as well as a more sustainable carpet tile. The European version, which is now available, is made from recycled plastic bottles and uses less energy to manufacture.

The carpet is being hailed by analysts as a significant step forward. "This company has shown that all that is required is a willingness to innovate," says Mike Bertelsen, president of Interface's research arm. "And the carpet is being sold as a 'green' product, which is a big step forward."

Unlike most such products, Solution Dyed PET has high efficiency and environmental performance that is not achievable through incremental improvements. It is a result of a transformation to environmental concern in Interface's core business.

During the previous 20 years Interface had grown from a small operation to become one of the world's largest commercial carpet manufacturers. In the 1990s, Interface wanted to cut its environmental impact. "In the early 1990s, Interface decided to look at the environmental impact of its operations," says Mr. Anderson. "We realised that we could do more to reduce our impact on the environment."

Mr. Anderson claims that Interface's new carpet is not just a product, but a systems approach to reducing environmental impact. "We have incorporated a systems approach to reducing our environmental impact," he says. "We have looked at every aspect of our operations to reduce our impact on the environment."

Environmental warnings needed: Ray Anderson pledged to make the entire company "sustainable"