

How Not to Install a Closet Flange

By Joseph P. Guzzo

I could have easily titled this article “How to Install a Closet Flange,” but that sounds too much like a do it yourself column. I figured homeowners already know how not to install a closet flange so they don’t have to read this. You would think a licensed plumber would know how to install a closet flange, “you would think.”



You have heard that phrase “pain in the neck.” Well that actually does happen to me. Seriously, whenever I get stressed out I really do get a pain in the neck. The more stress the more painful. One day on a routine rough plumbing inspection I noticed the plumber had installed the closet flanges on the sub floor, screwed down and glued in. I questioned the plumber and called the carpenter over. First I asked, why did you install the flange on the sub floor? He said to save time when installing the fixtures on the finish. Then I asked the carpenter what type of flooring was going to be installed, he said ½” plywood, ½” wonder board, thin set, and ceramic tile. We estimated that would bring the finished floor level up about 1 ½” over the flange. Back to the plumber, when you set the water closet how will you make up the difference? The plumber said, “well, I usually use two or three bowl waxes and long bolts.” My neck started to throb. I said “are you telling me that you are using the hole in the floor as part of the piping?” No Answer. The word must have got out, if you want to see a Plumbing Inspectors neck bulge install the closet flange on the sub floor. I swear it’s a conspiracy, because I started to see more and more closet flanges installed during the rough plumbing all different ways. Some imbedded in concrete, some jacked up with pieces of just about everything, strapping, sheetrock, coffee cups. Yes, and every time my neck would bulge out like a tennis ball. I would tell the plumber to remove them and install them during the finish, securely fastened to the finished floor. I usually did not check and would take their word they would remove them, besides I had to get out of there before I popped an artery. But, my curiosity got to me on one particular job and I went back to check before being called for a final. And behold there was a new tile floor with a hole the same diameter as the outside of the flange with the top of the flange sunk in about 2”. It was just *#@%(~\$*^ lovely. I can’t describe what happened next, let’s just say the phone lines melted.

Years ago when there was only lead, cast iron, and copper flanges, and plumbing was considered an art, there was never any question of how to properly install a closet flange, never. But something happened along the way. Let’s blame it on the computer, cell phone, doing 48 hours worth of work in 12 hours, the no time for nothing world we live in today. That together with the loss of an art we called plumbing. Whenever I asked the plumber why they installed the flange during the rough, the overwhelming response was to save time. Forget about workmanship, let’s just get out of here and get to the next job.

Now I really don’t have to describe how to properly install a closet flange securing it to the finished floor, with the hole in the floor slightly bigger than the socket of the flange, do I, besides it’s in the code book, look it up. So just do it, and take a little extra time for certain things. If for nothing else, to take some pride in your work. And perhaps we can bring back the lost art of plumbing.