

CFR The Commercial Flooring Report

For the Commercial Floor Covering Industry

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How Commercial Flooring Projects Have Changed

No longer are commercial flooring contractors expected to just install carpet and hard surface flooring materials of all types. Today they are expected to be experts in concrete, moisture, mitigation, adhesive and prep material and any other type of flooring or substrate related issue. Flooring contractors now install every type of flooring material there is, from broadloom carpet and carpet tile to hard surface vinyl, rubber, ceramic and stone as well as polished and stained concrete. In addition, they must be aware of and be able to install a multitude of substrate preparation systems and know about every flooring material and flooring related product being offered by manufacturers. They are literally inundated with new materials, products and information on a daily basis being offered by manufacturers of all kinds, many of whom know very little about the products themselves.



There are very few flooring manufacturers who have their own technical and field services people and far fewer yet who know anything about chemistry or physics. The sales and pseudo marketing people would rather not have any technical people involved when they come up with new products. Rather, they want the sales staff to present what they have to sell. Everyday the next, "best thing since sliced bread" product is perpetrated on the flooring community and when there's a failure of the new wonder products or materials it gets blamed on everything but the product or material itself. And the warranties, whatever they offer in the first paragraph they take away in those that follow. Most are as worthless as the words used to write them.



Why is it the flooring contractors' fault when something fails when what they did had no influence on the failure, which by the way is always provable by science. You remember what that is right? The short and simple definition of science is "a body of facts or truths systematically arranged and showing the operation of general laws such as biology, physics and chemistry all of it based on evidence" In other words, the reality of things. This would not be the thought of what's real, by people who know nothing about the science of the products and then try to argue that installation caused the problem or, I shudder saying this, that "the building moved which is why the flooring is reacting." The next time I hear someone use that as an excuse I'm going to have to use some Sicilian rectification to enlighten their sorry self. This can be compared to a guy selling bullets trying to tell the military how to win a war. Simply ludicrous. And it's not the only senseless statement made to justify a flooring installation or material failure that has no basis in fact.

Flooring contractors today are faced with unique situations on almost every flooring project they encounter. From old substrates, that had flooring material successfully installed on them, being replaced by new materials that react and behave completely differently than what was down and having to know, or hope to know, how the new material will react and not having it fail. To installing new materials that have compromising inherent or hidden characteristics that don't manifest themselves until some time after being installed. Or being told that no third party expert can tell you what's wrong with our product because it doesn't fit into a category of flooring; it's unique unto itself and only we, the manufacturer, know about it. Let that one sink it. This means no matter what anyone else thinks or knows and the science to prove it, has no bearing on your defense because we're all idiots but them. Uh, hate to break it to you boys, but you're a bit confused on this one and, by the way, the law will back this up as well. But nice try for coming up with an "original" argument otherwise technically described by the term BS. But, I digress, sorry, I'm letting emotion get in the way of logic so let me go back to the facts. Had to reel myself back in there.

So, as we were saying, the flooring contractor has to be an expert in all areas flooring, from what the flooring material goes on and what might be beneath it and what the flooring is that's being installed. Plus, the floor prep materials, adhesives, primers and whatever else there is related to the flooring. This was not the case not so long ago. It seems like the more things change, the more the flooring contractor has to know and, you know what, they just can't be expected to nor are they responsible for having to know all the information or the answers and shouldn't be expected to.

Flooring contractors are not experts in, nor should they be expected to be, experts in concrete. They don't make it, pour it, finish it or have anything to do with the process. They should be provided with a concrete substrate material and finish on which they can successfully install the flooring material, that will adhere to the substrate and not be compromised by anything in it, or on it, that will cause their installation to fail. If there is a failure of the installation by a condition related to the concrete, that's the people responsible for the concrete's problem, not the flooring contractor. Testing for moisture in the concrete is not the responsibility of the flooring contractors either, as there are specialists trained to do this who should be responsible for it. And, if after all is said and done there is a moisture issue, just because the concrete was tested, doesn't mean there wasn't going to be a moisture related flooring installation failure. There's that pesky science thing again; no escaping that. And, it's not just concrete and moisture that has to be a concern but a host of chemicals that are put in concrete that can be deal breakers.



THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT

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Other substrates also offer challenges like plywood. This stuff can contain a host of chemicals or be treated with them that

can cause an installation to fail. And now another issue is taking hold and that's the threat of mold forming under the flooring. Think about this for a minute. With more flooring material being floated on substrates, more incubators

are being built into the installation that provide a petri dish for mold and mildew to form beneath the flooring. Who owns that problem? Is it the flooring contractor, the specifier, the flooring manufacturer, building owner, GC or architect? Someone's going to get dinged for this and guess what, the low hanging fruit in this contest is, you guessed it, the flooring contractor.



Flooring contractors have to deal with every conceivable issue that can make or break a successful flooring installation. And if a flooring material fails, which will inevitably happen from time to time, they don't make the flooring and may not have had any influence in what was specified for a project. Flooring failures today are like playing Russian Roulette. You never know when the chamber is going to come up loaded but believe me, it does for somebody every day, unfortunately.

Flooring contractors actually know more about flooring than the people making and selling it to them in that they know what works where from experience and what they've used in the past to combat challenges in installation. They know what adhesives have worked successfully on projects where they face similar conditions. They know what manufacturers' products perform well and those that don't. In short, they know what they can trust to work on any given project. And further to change, most of the flooring contractors today belong to groups where they share information between and amongst themselves. From these associations they have a wealth of knowledge and experience to access.

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There are no magic bullets to fix anything. There is no “one thing” that makes everything work anymore. There are more challenges for flooring contractors today than ever before. The only answer is that each project has to be judged individually. The flooring contractor can only do so much. If they’re telling you they have concerns it’s best to sit down and listen to them and then work together to resolve any issues or ward off any potentially impending failures. They are not, nor should they be, responsible for anything that goes wrong just because the problem manifests itself visually as a flooring failure. You have to look beyond that to find the answer as to what went wrong and why and who or what is responsible. Remember that it’s best to prevent flooring failures up front than to have to deal with them after the project is completed and the space occupied, up and running and doing business. That’s a very bitter pill to swallow for everyone involved and no one is going to escape without losing some skin.

Here’s some tips. Don’t believe everything you hear or read about flooring products or things related to or associated with them. So much is based on one manufacturer saying something and everyone else saying the same thing or embellishing to get a leg up to sell their product. An example is any material that is anything “**proof**”, be it water, moisture, alkalinity or anything you can think of. Repeating this again for the umpteenth time, **words do not change the laws of physics nor do they alter science**. The facts will always provide the proof. And, **the flooring never lies**. People lie but never the flooring. Heed what we say here. We live where the industry does, we know what’s going on, we’ll never lie to you and we side with no one but the truth.

When and if you need us, we’re here for you. Like the fire department. You don’t want to have to call us but it’s nice to know we’ll respond with help when and if you need us. Our job and commitment to the industry, which is a unique, one of a kind business, is to determine what went wrong and why, who or what is at fault, solving and resolving the issue and what to do to fix things, which can always be done. And, probably most important, to work with clients to prevent flooring failures. As more than one flooring manufacturer has said, “LGM are not the guys you want sitting on the other side of the table.”

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