



The Commercial FLOORING REPORT



NEOCON 2009

It was evident, and no surprise, that Neocon's attendance was adversely affected by the economy. My guess from roaming the halls for two days is that attendance was off nearly 40%, those I've spoken with felt the same. That having been said, we've seen this slowdown at all the flooring trades shows this year. Those who did attend were serious about doing business. An entire entourage was not to be seen but key people from firms were there, and business was in fact being done. A simple poll taken of key flooring executives resulted in the exact same answers. Flooring exhibitors had cut back their expenses; fewer people, less spent on the showroom and parties. Those in attendance the manufacturers spoke with had projects in the works, they were given the opportunity of more attention spent with them and there was real business being conducted. No one we polled was sorry they attended. In perspective it was a good show under the economic circumstances.

PRODUCTS:

Neocon being a commercial product market didn't disappoint. There were new offerings from all flooring manufacturers. Milliken showed a new solution dyed nylon tile that was very exciting. Known primarily for printed products the new, well styled solution dyed carpet tile expands the market for them and adds more excitement to their line. Shaw had some great



looking new products and the styling from them just keeps getting better.

The Mohawk Group offered a variety of new broadloom and tile products from each division.



Bentley Prince Street-New Gotham Collection

Bentley Prince Street was showing a new line of wool products and an exciting array of new styles. Interface had the floor covered with some of their new tile styles as well. Carpet tiles are the center of attraction in the market and, if you hadn't noticed by now, they dominated in most every manufacturers space.

Fortune contract exhibited a new line of wool products that got a lot of interest. And the style leader is Atlas. Every year Atlas out does



Atlas-Dance Partner Collection

Atlas won three awards at Neocon, two for their Dance Partner broadloom collection; one for the Invista Innovation Gold Award and the other the

themselves. In my opinion Atlas is the style leader in the industry. Elena Brazile is the senior designer at Atlas and I think she is the most creative stylist in the industry producing the best looking carpet styles. No one does it better, all you have to do is look at their products.



Atlas-Atelier Collection III

Best of Neocon Silver Award. Their Atelier Collection III Carpet Tile won the Invista Innovation Merit Award.

THE ECONOMY:

Never in bad times does every business suffer. If you are in a unique business or a market unaffected by economic malaise, if you don't pay all that much attention to the news media and if the products or services you provide are still in demand you can survive and even thrive. As the saying goes, "In the face of adversity lies opportunity." There are many people out there doing business, some doing quite well. Business is not dead. Those tractor trailers you see out there on the highway

aren't just on joy rides. They're taking products some place and to some one. With

unemployment at about 10%, 90% of the people are still working. That means flooring is still getting walked on by masses of people, being "uglied out", worn out and used. To use an analogy, look at demand for goods and services like a balloon filling with water. At some point the balloon won't hold any more water and it bursts. The pent up demand for flooring

products, and in general products and services, will only endure so long before something's got to give. My opinion is that demand, when it filters back in, will be slow but steady, cautiously optimistic and measured. Actually, I'd rather see that as opposed to the "damn the torpedoes full speed ahead" mentality we had before this slow down occurred. Things could not have maintained that distorted pace and business was out of control. The slow down and vetting of the weak we are experiencing was an inevitability. Today to get business you have to be persistent, patient, determined, informed, and flexible and you can't be greedy. Greed is one of the things that got us into this mess. You can't be slow to respond to customers wants and needs, you have to conduct business letter perfect, your products have to be spot on without defects or compromise, fulfilling the need without compromise in performance or quality. Even if demands are unreasonable and they very well may be – after all this is a buyers market – you have to do whatever it takes to satisfy the customer. Anything less and you lose. Not a bad philosophy at any time. It's time the customer was the focus of satisfaction. If you keep looking for opportunity with an open mind, look at business from a different perspective and are willing to change and adapt, you will succeed and thrive. It's Darwin's Theory of Evolution at work, "The Survival of the Fittest."

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Nature goes through this all the time and so does business. Step back, survey the field, find the opportunities, keep plugging away and figure out what you have to do. Deliver the best service with the products that fill the need, installed perfectly, satisfy the customer, do what you say you will and you'll make it. One comment and pet peeve, that defies logic relative to the law of supply and demand is the price of oil. There's a glut of oil and the price still goes up. This has nothing to do with the law of supply and demand but with speculators hedging their bets with oil. The price of every product and service is down as people struggle to make ends meet but the greed factor still prevails with oil.

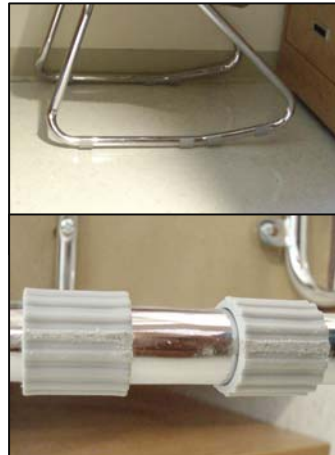
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**PERFECTLY DESIGNED FLOOR
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This is a case of the wrong type chair guide or foot being used on a vinyl tile floor causing a complaint for which the floor was being blamed.



The chairs used in a college dormitory for desks and work stations had feet on them that resemble the track of a bulldozer. The feet were leaving indentations in the vinyl flooring that had the end user thinking the flooring was defective because it was too soft. The

students moved the chairs around in the room causing indentations all over. The photos will show the problem. Tiles from the installation were tested and found to exceed the normal indentation load standard. Tiles were removed to check the adhesive and the concrete. Nothing was found to be

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wrong with the tiles or any other flooring component. The feet on the chairs concentrated an enormous amount of weight on the flooring material in a small area. Like ladies spiked high



heel shoes the force of the weight concentrated on a very small area actually exerts thousands of pounds of force resulting in indentations in the flooring material. The feet used on these chairs couldn't have been designed better to ruin the vinyl tile flooring. This was not a case of the flooring being a problem or a cause for the complaint. The feet on the chairs are the cause of the damage and this puts the supplier of the chairs, or whoever selected them, in the position of responsibility. The only way to fix this floor is to replace it and it affects 300 rooms. After this is done the chairs can actually be fitted with a different foot that will not put so much weight in a small concentrated area but will dissipate it over a larger area. Somebody wasn't paying attention when they specified this foot be used on the chair. The design of the foot should have been questioned before it even got used on the chair. Just because the flooring material, whatever it may be, exhibits a problem doesn't mean it is the cause. This is a case of being oblivious to the obvious.

TIME FOR A CHANGE BY: DAVE HORAN


Recently NOFMA-The National Oak Flooring Manufacturers Association, became the latest casualty of the changing flooring industry in the United States. There are several reasons for the demise of this very fine association but it would be safe to say that NOFMA was no longer needed by

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the majority of wood flooring producers selling their wares in this country. Very few wood flooring companies were actually members of NOFMA. Membership was voluntary, rare, and expensive. Non-domestic producers weren't burdened by the expense or quality standards which members had agreed to live by. Many end users didn't care if their wood was manufactured to stringent quality standards. They simply bought the cheapest floor they could find that had the look they wanted.

NOFMA also had the task of establishing some standards pertaining to grades for wood flooring in the US. The problem with this is that grading only applies to unfinished wood. Factory finished flooring producers get to set their own standards. They get to make up names for their grades. One manufacturer's "Select" grade doesn't necessarily have anything in common with another manufacturer's grade of the same name.

Now that NOFMA is gone, there is no organization or association which has the authority to establish what is or isn't acceptable when it comes to hardwood flooring. The National Wood Flooring Association says they have no authority to establish standards. This may be a blessing in disguise since many of the individuals who work with the NWFA to establish guidelines pertaining to wood flooring are employees of various wood flooring manufacturers. The guidelines are

designed to give the installation the best chances for success. The guidelines establish acceptable fastener patterns, moisture contents, jobsite conditions, and possible cures for problems, among other things. What they do not establish are realistic, common sense standards for what should be considered acceptable to the end user.

What kinds of problem might the end user experience which has no standards to be judged by. A few are overwood, checks and splits, width variations, finish variations, and durability.

With the foxes guarding the henhouse you are not going to get any standards established which could end up costing the foxes a lot of money. A new organization has to enter this game to make it fair for the end users and installers. The way it currently works is that if a floor is installed and looks terrible because of overwood, checks, gaps between boards, etc. it is the flooring contractor, installer or end users fault. The installer should have culled the bad boards or the space should have been better conditioned. The installer is expected to be an unpaid inspector who assumes all of the responsibility for the quality of the finished project and that's not his job. That responsibility lies with the manufacturer.

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