

# CFR THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT

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## YOU'VE DONE EVERYTHING RIGHT AND YOUR WRONG; NOW WHAT?

Not a week goes by that we don't get a call from a flooring contractor or general contractor about a flooring installation that failed after they've done everything right only to be told by someone charged with coming to the site, looking at the problem and telling the lamenting party that they are in the wrong. So what do you do when you believe that you've done everything right, followed all the directions to the letter but you're still accused of doing wrong - short of pulling your hair out and screaming?

We're going to look at several actual cases we've been involved with lately and use them as examples of what we're talking about.

1. The first is the case of cornrowing carpet. This is a residential installation down for a short period of time that began manifesting corn rows – these actually look like rows of corn in a field thus the name. The dealer who happens to be a commercial flooring contractor with a residential division is being told the condition is the result of them using the wrong carpet cushion and installation. Now this is one of the most absurd and ludicrous reasons for denying a claim as I've heard in 45 years in the business, even though nothing surprises me anymore in this industry when it comes to opining on the cause of a flooring failure. The cushion under the carpet and installation has absolutely nothing to do with cornrowing. Now What? The cause is either manufacturing related – called gauge lines – which is a tufting issue or a vacuum cleaner set too low or traffic in a concentrated, unalterable and pivotal area but it is NEVER due to installation or the cushion. Long fiber lengths in high pile carpets are most susceptible to this condition such as shags and it rarely if ever plagues commercial type carpet constructions. This is why rakes are sold for this type of carpet so the pile can be “groomed” or lifted to remove corn rows.



2. Ends' lifting on a luxury vinyl plank installation in a church is our next case. The installer says he did everything correct and he's installed miles of hard surface flooring and never experienced a problem like this. The LVP is only curling on the ends and all of the planks are involved. An independent inspector said this is an installation problem caused by using the wrong type of adhesive – dry set versus wet set. I can understand the reason for one versus the other in a commercial installation but neither method and no

adhesive is meant to hold modular flooring material of any type flat to the floor. The inherent characteristics of the flooring material to drape – lay flat and conform – should be built into the product. If the flooring lifts up on the ends or the sides this indicates an intrinsic characteristic caused by an imbalance in the material.



Now What? We can perform ASTM technical standards testing to determine whether a flooring product conforms to manufacturing and industry standards of which lying flat and being stable are a part of. You could also lay a couple pieces of the material on a perfectly flat surface – such as a glass top conference table (a revealing rudimentary test) in an acclimated environment to see if the materials edges or ends lift at all. We've found that sometimes when the ASTM tests are conducted there is no visible reaction until the material is allowed to relax for about 48 hours and then it lifts or curls. So we've learned to wait and see what the reaction is and then gauge it.

3. Substrates – concrete and wood – continue to cause flooring installation failures and this problem is not going to go away anytime soon. One case, of many on this particular issue, is adhesive degradation caused by alkalinity in the concrete substrate instigated by moisture vapor emission from the slab. Concrete, whether on grade or above, never dries and movement of moisture vapor from the concrete can be caused by changes in the ambient conditions in a building – primarily cycling of the air handling system or changes in environmental conditions caused by natural seasonal weather changes. The dealer used an adhesive that was supposed to be resistant to failure only to experience one after five years. Alkalinity from the concrete carried by the moisture vapor to the surface will break down the tackifier – the sticky part of the adhesive - causing the adhesive bond to disappear. Now What? After five years the flooring contractor has no recourse with the adhesive manufacturer or flooring manufacturer who mandated the use of the adhesive. The only thing to do which was being done is to remove the flooring material, scrape up the adhesive, mitigate the cause of the failure with a sealer and start over again.



**THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT**  
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4. An installation of luxury vinyl plank is plagued by a white haze on the surface of the material from dust caused by sanding drywall during the construction process. Nothing it seems can get the white haze off or out of the material. The contractor is frustrated by the fact that they can't seem to solve this problem. The flooring material has a surface, as all these wood patterned LVP's do, with wood grain texturing. The graining collects and holds the dust being created by the sanding and when cleaning with a wet method is attempted the dust is turned into a paste which hardens in the textured surface. Now What? Fortunately, so far, in this case everyone is on board with trying to resolve the issue. An affected section of the flooring has been removed and an expert in cleaning hard surface flooring – one of our associates – developed a method and procedure that effectively resolved the issue. But this is a very specific process involving mechanical and cleaning agent methods employed together to clean the surface of the LVP. All wood look LVP has graining and unless the flooring is covered completely and protected from dirt caused by construction it can become contaminated and damaged. As with all construction projects the new flooring, whether soft or hard, is not supposed to be the drop cloth that other trades work upon. Flooring should be the last material installed on a project – a utopian wish – but because it's not it must be protected otherwise you're going to experience the frustration that occurred on this job.


5. A VCT installation at a school is failing in sections, not overall, after about 8 months and the flooring contractor suspects someone has done something to cause this. He's right. The floor was cleaned after construction with a substance that contains strong chemicals that will break the bond of the adhesive. Because this is a tile installation and water in volume will migrate into the tile edges and seep beneath them the cleaning agent emulsifies the adhesive and thus the tiles become loose and debonded. Now What? The affected tiles will have to be removed and replaced but first the substrate has to be treated in the affected areas to neutralize the effects of the cleaning agent. This cleaner can actually be compared to an abatement treatment because it can have the same effects on adhesive. Furthermore, the effects of the cleaning agent may not have totally manifested itself so the repair work that has to be done now may turn out to

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be more extensive down the road. This is not the flooring contractor's problem but that of the firm cleaning the floor and they should be held responsible for causing the failure.

All of these examples occurred after the installations were done by the book but the snake in the woodpile appeared to cause a failure. Sometimes the snake is readily evident but other times you have to poke at the pile to expose it and make sure that it doesn't snap at you. Because the flooring always exhibits the failure, the first response by everyone is that the flooring or the installation of it is the problem and therefore the fault of the flooring contractor but more often than not we find that this is not the case. And if you don't know anything about the complexities of what causes the failures the "opinions" of those who think they know what the cause is can make matters much worse. You can't afford to have someone who thinks they know or claims to know evaluate a flooring failure that really doesn't know and as a result the wrong party gets blamed to the tune of massive amounts of money.

Fixing these things is always far more expensive than the initial installation.

We know this stuff better than anyone in the industry and we can always determine what happened and why; it's who we are and what we do. So if you have a problem and need an answer or if you want to prevent a failure and stay out of trouble, call us first.



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