

# CFR The Commercial Flooring Report

For the Commercial Floor Covering Industry

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## HOW LONG DOES FLOORING LAST?

This was an interesting question posed last week by a flooring contractor working on a project and looking for an answer to the question, how long does flooring last, or how long should it last. He was asked by his client. A good friend of mine and I discussed this, and I thought, shouldn't this be obvious? But then again, it's not often discussed in the scope of things and not a matter covered by a specification. In this age of being green, the answer to the question becomes more important. One of the sayings I use when talking about avoiding flooring failures and claims is, "get it in the door and keep it on the floor." That means, select the correct product, properly installed, so that it lives up to the expectations of the end user without a premature failure. The part that often goes overlooked is, for how long is that?

For that answer we have to consider where the product is going, who's buying it and for what and how long do they expect it to last? In the hospitality industry the life of the product may be short due to having to keep the property – the hotel – relevant and competitive in the marketplace. That would also be influenced by the level of quality the hotel projects - a 5 star property versus a three star or below property. The more you pay for the product, any product for that matter, the more you expect to get, and the more up to date product you expect for the price you have to pay. That 5 star property is also marketed differently than a lesser quality property because the customers expectations dictate it. Therefore, the flooring would be replaced more often, as would other furniture and fixtures. The flooring would also be more unique, such as a woven, one of a kind, wool/nylon blend Axminster. On the opposite side of the spectrum would be public buildings such as schools and government office buildings. These would be more utilitarian and require a product that was reasonably priced and one that would last for many years – 20 or more wouldn't be out of the realm of expectations.



VERY OLD CARPET TILE IN AN AIRPORT THAT'S  
BEEN WELL MAINTAINED

With the variety of flooring products available today, most of which are hard surface, one has no idea how long the product is supposed to last. If a luxury vinyl plank looks like a piece of wood, no matter what the cost, what's to differentiate one from another at any price? Don't tell me quiet and comfort! These are hard surface floors. The word HARD should be enough to convey the fact that these floors are not soft, warm and quiet. Some sales and marketing geniuses keep touting those not inherent attributes in all the trade publications you read but it ain't true. Carpet is soft and quiet but hard surface vinyl flooring is not.

Let's get back on track. There is no study that's been done on how long flooring materials should last. The closest study was done by the Carpet and Rug Institute years ago, comparing carpet to hard surface flooring primarily relative to maintenance as well as information on the benefits of carpet. But no study on the longevity. There was also a guide from J&J, also done years ago, that categorized carpet for use in a particular application such as schools, airports, businesses and other commercial applications and rated each as light, moderate, heavy and extra heavy traffic. We can use those same classifications for any flooring today, given that it's taken into consideration. The products we'd be looking at for this, in the soft surface category, would be broadloom carpet – tufted or woven – and carpet tiles. In the hard surface category it would be sheet vinyl, VCT, vinyl plank and tile, rubber, ceramic, stone or variants of this category and wood. Also, Terrazzo, tile and polished concrete which we could call "Forever Products."

We have to look at what the product is and where it's going and what the end users' expectations of use are. It's actually easier to qualify carpet than it is hard surface flooring. There is no study, nor has there ever been one, on how long flooring should last. Common sense, as well as experience, should tell you how well any product should perform and last.

Again, with regards to carpet, there are a multitude of factors that affect performance. The following things must be considered to determine broadloom carpet and carpet tile longevity:

- ⇒ Construction (density, yarn type, pile height, pile weight, backing)
- ⇒ Style (cut pile, cut and loop, loop)
- ⇒ Color (the lighter the color the worse the product will look over time)
- ⇒ Where is it being installed? (high traffic area vs. low traffic area)
- ⇒ How is it being maintained (this is crucial to overall longevity)

Can a carpet last 20 years? Of course, and we've seen many that have. For example, the woven nylon carpet at the Portland, Oregon airport was down for just over 20 years. The product we helped design and construct for replacement was expected to last as long, and properly cared for, it will. You could shoot bullets at the thing it's so highly engineered.



**THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT**  
*Lew Migliore - President*  
P (706) 370-5888 or Email: [lgmtcs@optilink.us](mailto:lgmtcs@optilink.us)  
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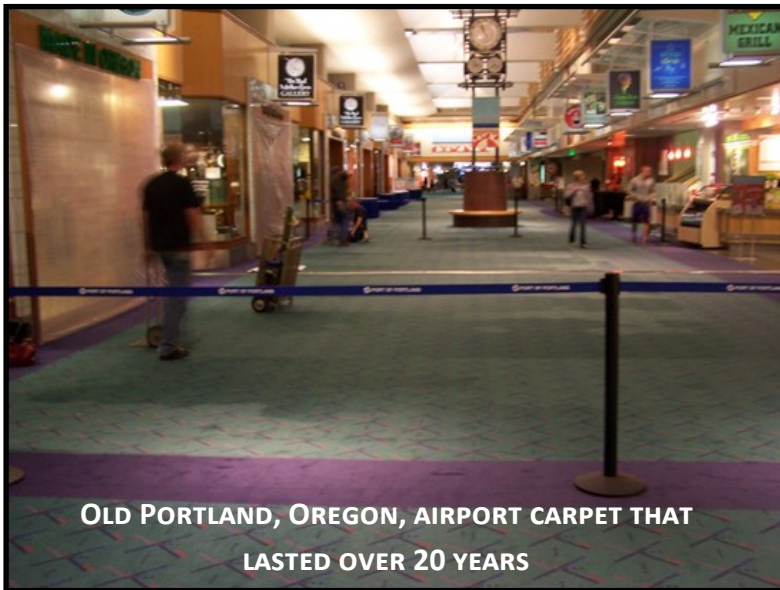


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U.S. Patent 7,231,815, 8,047,056, 9,032,791 & 9,588,092. Additional patents pending.

**See Page 5 Regarding Excess  
Inventory Offer**

Here's the key to determining how long a product should last in simple form.

- ⇒ Where is the product going to be used?
- ⇒ What is the application – multi-family, office environment, school, etc.?
- ⇒ What type of traffic is it going to be subjected to – light, medium, heavy or extra heavy?
- ⇒ How much use and abuse is it going to receive?
- ⇒ Any inherent characteristics of the product that would inhibit performance or enhance performance?
- ⇒ What color is the product, regardless of whether it is soft or hard surface?
- ⇒ What's the budget for the product?
- ⇒ What are the expectations and can the product meet them?
- ⇒ What did they have before and how long did it last?
- ⇒ Is there a maintenance program and what is it?
- ⇒ Is the product designed, engineered and constructed for the particular purpose of use?



That's a lot of stuff to consider, understand and know, but it's important if the product is going to have to deliver a certain expectation.

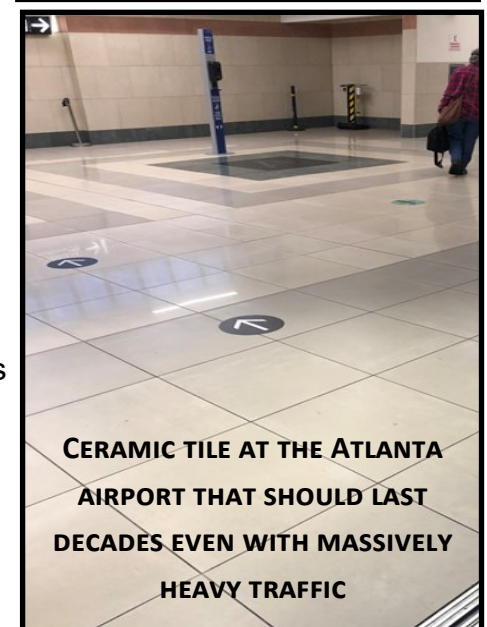
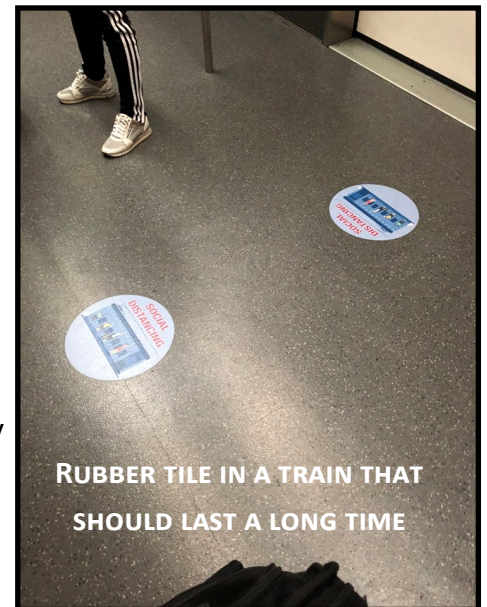
What's certain is that no one expects a low level of performance from their flooring investment, regardless of what that was. And no one wants to have new flooring installed and then experience a failure shortly thereafter. This is where you have to understand the inherent characteristics of the product. If you know that a particular product has had a propensity to fail then you shouldn't use it anywhere no matter what. Today with so much vinyl tile and plank coming from overseas, where the majority of it is made, quality is all over the place - and people selling it, that don't make it, think they know it but they don't. All of the issues with this product, as I've said before, are hiding in plain site and most people can't see them or don't know what to look for, or don't understand the product, especially when there's a failure.

The best thing to do, if you have the opportunity, or if you sell the product or influence what's being selected, is to help guide the end user towards a product you have experience with, and know it will deliver performance up to their expectations. The product may cost a bit more up front but the cost will actually be less as it performs and is amortized over a longer period of time. And don't think you can't do this because you can. We do this often with clients who engage our consulting services in the selection of the right product. As a marketing student I can tell you that price is not the primary factor in a purchase. In marketing, the list goes as follows: quality, value, service, performance and price. Never sell price – something the flooring industry doesn't understand. I've been in business all my life, since I was 8 years old shoveling snow, and have never sold price. When we (LGM) get involved with a flooring failure and have to provide a resolution, price is never the primary factor or objective. If the right product was used initially, that would have actually performed, the premature failure would not have occurred.

If you're looking for an average on how long a product will last, it's likely about 5 to 7 years for soft goods. For hard surface, such as sheet vinyl and VCT, it's going to be longer and could be 20 years or more. Rubber will also last a lifetime as will Terrazzo and polished concrete. Ceramic and stone tiles will do the same. Luxury vinyl tile and plank, depending on where and how it's used and what the quality is, could be estimated at 3 to 7 years. The jury is still out on this product as there's so much of it flooding the market with quality, as mentioned previously, is all over the place. Buy this product from a reputable and legitimate manufacturer to be safe but remember, they don't even make all of the products they sell. But the bottom line is that the right product in the right place can last as long as anyone expects it to, given its inherent capabilities and care.

Hopefully, this information will help you get the right product in the right place so it will deliver the best and longest performance. Nobody wants to have a product fail shortly after installation regardless of how cheap they bought it.

If you have questions, need help or guidance or have a problem, failure or claim that creates finger pointing, contact us. We always have the answers, always. And if you have a project that you want to avoid having failures with, from concrete to carpet, get us involved. We have the best and brightest associates in the industry available to keep you out of trouble.





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