

# CFR The Commercial Flooring Report

For the Commercial Floor Covering Industry

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## HOW TO TURN A \$.59 CENTS A SQUARE FOOT FLOORING INVESTMENT INTO A MAJOR LOSS

The title of this issue may sound strange, but this is something that occurs regularly. A flooring installation, of whatever the cost of the flooring material itself, and we'll look at modular vinyl flooring particularly, can be a matter of cents per square foot until it fails. Flooring failures can turn a reasonable investment in flooring material into a major catastrophic and costly loss faster than a speeding bullet. So, if the flooring material cost is \$.59 cents, or whatever the figure you want to use, its failure can turn into hundreds of thousands of dollars quickly. We've got cases where the flooring material cost is below \$20,000 and the lawsuit for damages exceeds \$1.2 million dollars. These types of cases are not unusual for us.

Remember that whatever the cause of the floorings physical change in appearance is, it will always initially be attributed to the installation. Somehow the installation must be the cause of the floorings failure or why else would the flooring be lifting, cupping, curling or changing its physical condition, whatever it may be?

There are a multitude of reasons these situations occur, and you should understand that every one of them is unique. They may look the same, but they aren't, and you must know how to discern the differences. For example, every time there is an end lift or cupping issue with luxury vinyl plank or tile or laminate for that matter, the typical determination, or conclusion drawn, is that the material is installed too tight into the room because there is no expansion space, or the substrate is unlevel. Or the material wasn't acclimated or the temperature in the space in which the flooring was installed was not controlled. Therefore, the complaint is deemed justified due to this installation mistake when the real reason is likely something else entirely. But this is what's being taught, what the general line of belief is, and what everyone wants to blindly accept as fact. Repeating this, for the umpteenth time, "the flooring never lies, it will always tell you what's wrong if you know how to interpret what it's saying." Interpreting what it's saying requires deep understanding of the product and the conditions, which few have a real grasp of.



What you must be looking at is the flooring itself and start there. Since the flooring is what's showing the problem, it makes sense to look at it first. The evidence is normally hiding in plain site but is very often overlooked, not recognized or an assumption made as to the cause without viable evidence of proof.

More and more we see people making up reasons for a flooring failure that are absurd. I was talking with a friend about this and how manufacturers explanations for why a product is doing something make no sense at all. Also, how inspectors fail to see the forest for the trees

when looking at a problem and call it one thing while it's actually another. For example, photo number 1 was determined to be an installation issue because the flooring was cupping. However, every piece of the flooring was cupping uniformly and some of the planks were lifting on the ends. Now think about this. You can conduct your own experiment on this as well.



PHOTO #1—CUPPING

With vinyl planks as our flooring of example. When a lateral force is exerted against a vertical surface, that force is pushing the material against the wall. The material closest to the wall reacts by pushing back in the opposite direction. (the law of equal and opposite reaction) When this happens the reaction is for the adjacent piece of flooring to lift and both of the pieces, the one next to the wall and the one just out from it, collide and peak upward. They don't cup and they don't cause all the other pieces across the floor to cup. Just take your hands and place them flat in front of you, with fingers touching, and push them together so the middle fingers lift. Your middle fingers will want to push upward, that's what happens to flooring fitted too tight. It reacts at the point of the force applied to it. Cupping is an imbalance in the flooring material itself and not the result of expansion force. When you walk into a space and see this, the flooring is screaming at you as to the cause.



PHOTO #2—CUPPING



### **THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT**

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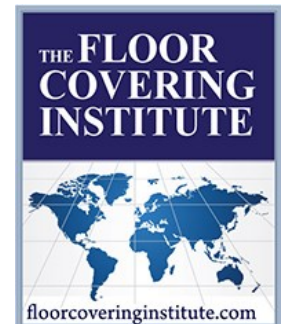
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Page Layout By: Anita S. Drennon

Now, back to the low cost, high loss point. Looking at the photos in this newsletter you can see several different situations, all thought to be installation issues and none of them are. Photos 3 and 4 both show the results of abatement chemicals used to remove old cut back adhesive, coming back for a visit. We see this all too often. The abatement chemicals and the surfactants (soap) used to rinse them, always leave a residue in the concrete. The more porous the concrete is the more residue is left behind. You think the substrate is clean and dry and everything looks good but lurking in the slab is a villain that's waiting to destroy the flooring and the installation.



**PHOTO #3—ABATED SLAB WITH THE CUT BACK Oozing BACK UP, AFFECTING THE FLOORING, AND CAUSING THE FAILURE OF THE INSTALLATION.**



**PHOTO #4—STAIN FROM CUT BACK ADHESIVE ABATEMENT CHEMICALS AND RESIDUAL EMULSIFIED CUT BACK ADHESIVE STAINING A VINYL COMPOSITION TILE FLOOR.**

The installation takes place over the abated slab, the slab is covered with adhesive and a non-permeable flooring material. The slab, since it had cut back on it, is likely old with no vapor retarder beneath it. Or, just porous enough to hold onto to the liquid abatement chemical and soap. The chemicals come back up out of the concrete, maybe with the help of some moisture vapor, and start to compromise the new adhesive and the flooring. And that's what they do. No adhesive is going to resist the abatement chemistry because it is made to emulsify adhesive. The flooring is a chemical product as well made up of various chemical components that are affected by solvents or solvent type

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

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products. The adhesive and the flooring react, and you have yourself a nicely packaged flooring failure.

So, I ask you to look at photo 5 and think about what an installation firm or installer can do to cause this dark stain, since these are not the people who did the abatement? And the other photos, what could an installer or installation company do to make the flooring look the way it does? NOTHING!

The flooring may have cost less than a buck a foot to buy but the failure sends the cost into the stratosphere and the cause is first blamed on the flooring installer or flooring contractor. No matter what, the flooring contractor and installer are forced to defend themselves from the accusation. The perpetrator, the abatement guys, are usually long gone and forgotten. Or the architect that specified the process is left off the hook or whoever made the decision to do something so stupid, isn't held liable. But the answer my friends is looming large and in plain sight. And most of the time it is. Flooring failures are not brain surgery or rocket science. These products are really pretty simple. Like people, they each have their own characteristics and they bring them with them from the factory to the floor. When they get there, they relax and do their thing and challenge someone to figure out what they're doing. When you don't know, you assume or speculate, and this puts a lot of innocent people in the cross hairs of your ignorance. When you do know and say directly what's happening, some idiot comes up with an excuse that wouldn't fly if it had wings, trying to push the blame on "the bad guys", the flooring contractor or installers.

And this is how you turn a pennies on the dollar flooring failure into a six or seven figure loss. What's most amazing, when you see these failures, is how little it would have taken to prevent the problem – and there is always a way, always. Doing something different, using a different product, preparing the site more appropriately or just waiting a while for the right conditions, is all it may take. Instead, everyone's in a hurry to get the job done, schedules are crunched, a "magic bullet" chemical or product is used, someone doesn't pay attention to something that should or shouldn't be done, and you're off to the failure races.

The last guys you should ever want to see on a job that failed is LGM. If we show up it's a big problem. On the other hand, we always know what went wrong, why, who's at fault and, most importantly, how to fix it. In fact, we should be contacted ahead of time to render help, so you don't have a failure.

So, some tips for you learned over decades of being in this game and dealing with countless attorneys on a weekly basis. Keep a calendar of events from the time you start a job until the end. Take pictures of everything. Record temperatures and humidity of a space. Take note of the substrate conditions and, again, take pictures. Record conversations: when they occur and with whom and what was said. Nothing is too trivial, and you must cover your ass lest someone tries to take a bite out of it. And read everything on every product you use and those used on the job that you didn't use but that can affect your installation. Like a product we recently saw that failed. In the product information sheet, it said the size of the product changes from morning to afternoon- it really did! Why would you ever buy this stuff or install it when the manufacturer admits in print that it's unstable.

We are living in an age of information, and we're flooded with it but much of it is false and just plain bullshit. We will never BS you when you come to us for help. You may not like what you hear but it will be the truth. Our job is to determine why a flooring project failed and we're in a league of our own with that.

At LGM, we are hard asses after the truth. We don't care who retains our services, the answer is the same no matter who's paying the bill, that would include my mother, rest her soul. We don't do this to make friends. We do it because our clients need help and answers, and that we can give them - without question. That's our mission.

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