

# CFR The Commercial Flooring Report

For the Commercial Floor Covering Industry

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## AS A FLOORING CONTRACTOR, HOW MUCH ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO KNOW?

If the flooring manufacturers or provider of the materials used to install flooring don't know their product, then how is the flooring contractor supposed to know? If the concrete is new or old, how is the flooring contractor supposed to know what's in it, or on it, and if it will adversely affect the flooring installation?

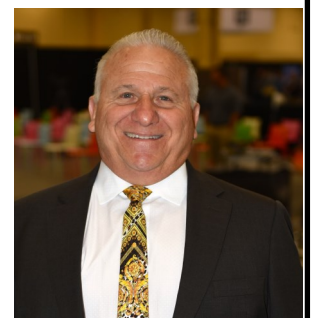
Many of the so called flooring manufacturers of vinyl flooring products don't make the product but source it from a manufacturer, who themselves may contract out the production of the product if they can't fulfill the order. Where's the control and oversight on that? If these so called manufacturers don't know how the product is being produced and it fails, how is the flooring contractor supposed to know that? Many of the so called manufacturers or distributors of flooring products, most of which are being imported, are operated by former executives of carpet manufacturing, or from some other part of the flooring industry, having never been in vinyl flooring manufacturing and who don't know or understand the products they're selling. They may trust the source of the product, but they don't oversee the manufacture of it or have any control over how it's produced, who's actually making it, and what materials and processes are being employed. And many of the field technical people being used by these companies have never been involved in hard surface flooring. If they don't know, how is the flooring contractor supposed to know? If you're not a chemist or a product development specialist or an expert in the manufacture of a product, be it a hard or soft surface flooring material or a concrete additive, how can you know and how is the flooring contractor supposed to know? And how can some engineer from a highfalutin named company, who is supposed to determine the cause of a flooring failure determine that without ever seeing the failure, understanding flooring material or determining the failure by reading documents? And how can they pass judgement on a flooring contractor if they themselves don't know anything about the products used or the actual conditions that exist or existed at the time of the installation? How is it that being ignorant of physical conditions and believing lies, told so many times that they are accepted as truths, by people blaming the flooring contractor, make it the floor contractors' fault? How is it that a general contractor can ask a flooring contractor to proceed with an installation when they are aware of a compromising condition and still want the flooring contractor to warrant the installation and the flooring material?

Guest Article on  
Page 6-8 [Wagner  
Meters](#)—Author:  
Jason Spangler—  
LeapFrogging: A  
Not-So-Best Prac-  
tice for Concrete  
Moisture Testing

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So many questions that pose a threat to the success of a flooring installation that the flooring contractor is supposed to have the answers to, yet the providers of the products themselves don't have the answers to. And then, with so many different flooring products flooding the market; adhesives, moisture mitigating systems, concrete additives and concrete designs, and then testing methods, how is a flooring contractor supposed to know them intimately? And how does he know that



Substrate System Gone Wrong

they even work, or that the person doing the testing did it right, or the conditions under which the test was conducted were right? In many, many cases the flooring contractor may never have heard of a product or never worked with it or didn't choose to use it at all, and how is the flooring contractor supposed to know everything about any of these products or materials? Yet, when there's a failure or the flooring contractor balks at using something they're unfamiliar with, or that they have no history with, or gets the response, "we've never had a flooring failure with this product," he's supposed to trust someone making the statement about the product that they themselves don't even make? Folks, this is the state of the flooring industry today. It's become more and more complex with a multitude of variables in products, components and materials that fewer people in the industry know nothing about. We see it every day, and it's getting worse. The ignorance is pervasive, and the stupidity is astounding. We read information and can't believe someone would create a document that is so devoid of facts about an issue, and it's being accepted as fact. How many times I blurt out during the course of a day, "you must be kidding me with this crap!" And then being taxed with having to wade through the slop being spewed to expose the truth about the issue.



**THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT**

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Now let's look at some examples of actual situations that have occurred that initiated the tirade I'm on.

A building expansion project with a substrate contaminated with residual asphaltic material that was supposedly mitigated. A new cementitious overlay was placed, and a new sheet vinyl flooring slated to be installed in the space. It was noticed that the overlay material was debonding from the original substrate due to the residual contaminant, supposedly removed, compromising the bond at the interface of the two substrate materials. The bond failure was progressing, and stop gap measures to replace affected areas were being taken, but the general contractor wanted the flooring contractor to install the flooring anyway over patched areas. We determined through physical inspection, analysis and testing core samples, that the failure would continue. The only way to correct the compromising condition was to go back to square one, remove the cementitious overlay, mitigate the original substrate and start over. This was an expensive and time consuming proposition, but it was necessary to prevent the ongoing and future failures. Fixing the obvious affected areas was only a band aid on a gaping wound. The GC understood but was still pushing for the installation under the current circumstances so the project could be finished on schedule. Even with the GC's word that they'd take responsibility for any failures, this was a suicide mission for the flooring contractor. Any flooring manufacturer, made aware of the conditions, would never warrant their products under these conditions. The flooring contractor was advised to refuse to do the work until the substrate was put into a condition that was appropriate for the installation. The flooring contractor had nothing to do with any of the initial work done on the contaminated concrete slab nor did they pour the cementitious overlay. Their contract was only for the flooring material, minor floor prep and the installation. They were not involved with anything done prior to this, nor with the festering cause of the failure. Yet they were being coerced into installing the flooring anyway. If this situation hadn't been noticed, and there was a flooring failure, the flooring contractor would have been the first one everyone turned to fix it. Even though he would have had nothing to do with the cause of the failure, he would have been blamed for the failure, and would have had to defend himself. Fortunately, that didn't happen because we determined the root cause of the problem and put the brakes on the project.

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In another case, and we can say other cases here, a previous flooring material was removed in an abatement project in an old building. The old asbestos containing flooring was removed and the cut back adhesive abated with a chemical, which could be a citrus or soy based or an aliphatic solvent. The flooring contractor had no part in the abatement process. The substrate, after abatement, is supposed to be rinsed with a surfactant – a soap solution – which is often a dishwashing detergent. In a perfect situation the abatement chemical and the surfactant are supposed to be purged from the substrate. Typically, in old buildings that have flooring that has to be abated, the concrete substrate is porous, so the chemicals migrate into the concrete. If the concrete is on grade with no vapor retarder beneath it, which there wouldn't be in a building old enough to have to have an abated floor, moisture migrating upward through the capillaries in the concrete will bring with it the residual abatement chemicals. These chemicals act on the new adhesive and flooring as they did on the old flooring materials, breaking down the new adhesive and affecting the new flooring causing a failure. The abatement guys have long since disappeared over the horizon. The flooring contractor now becomes the villain blamed for the flooring failure. He may or may not have been aware of the abatement and, since it was done prior to any flooring installation, the time that has elapsed would have everyone believe that the effects of the abatement chemicals are no longer an issue. But, alas, the substrate and the environment don't see it that way. So, the failure occurs and the last guys on the job, the flooring guys, get blamed for something they didn't do or know nothing about. How were they supposed to know if no one mentioned anything to them and there was no sign of a compromising agent or condition evident at the time they began the floor prep and installation? You may say they should have known, and I'll add that questions should always be asked about previous conditions. But even with answers it doesn't mean that something may be lurking in the wood pile that will cause a failure.

Or, one of my favorites that I've written about before, is situations where a carpet tile is curling, and the cause is blamed on the residual adhesive(s) that were on the substrate. If the old flooring was ripped up prior to the flooring contractor arriving on site for the new installation, and he had no knowledge of what the old flooring was, or even all the other old flooring materials that may have been installed in a building that has gone through more than one flooring replacement, how is the flooring contractor supposed to know what had been installed in the past and with what? He doesn't and can't unless he's clairvoyant.

Or, last one, I promise, at least in this issue, a flooring contractor working off installation instructions and relying on a warranty and both suddenly change during the course of the installation or after a complaint on the flooring occurs and being told that you had the old information. Old information! When the hell did you change it! Only to find out, and this actually happened recently - twice, I'm not making this up, that the information was changed when the complaint occurred. We just had one of these on a project where the luxury vinyl plank was contorting on the floor. The "manufacturer" actually provided the "new" information that was supposed to have been used, after the flooring failed. Where's my 2x4 to smack these idiots in the head with! How is the flooring contractor supposed to know what he was supposed to do, if the rules change while the game is being played?

And you know what? This crap happens every day and it's getting worse. You have to be paranoid installing flooring today because either there is no information, incorrect information or the information changes while the installation is in process. Or people who you trust to know are telling you things they have no idea about since they have no technical knowledge. Do you think I'm lying or exaggerating? The information in this newsletter comes from actual cases we're working on daily. How is anyone to know?

Well, we know. That's our job. And, here it is again, "the flooring never lies. It will ALWAYS tell you what's wrong if you know how to interpret what it's saying" Unfortunately, people lie or try to influence or deny or argue away a flooring failure, but the evidence exhibited by the flooring doesn't lie. This is science – physics and chemistry – and it's true whether you believe it or not. Flooring contractors aren't chemists or physicists or scientists. They, and we all as consumers of the product, trust that it will perform as expected by whoever is expecting it to perform.

This is why LGM exists, to provide answers to what went wrong and why, who's at fault, and how do you fix it. And we always have the answers, always, and it's always the truth whether you want to believe it or not. That's the way it has to be, and that's the way it is. And it matters not who the client is or what side of the aisle they're on, we don't care, the truth is what it is.

Here's a bit of satire for you, written by one of our associates. Appropriate in any flooring claim situation as it seems this is the way your claims wind up.

"I'm launching a new inspection service that offers low prices and a money back guarantee. For \$150 I will provide a written report based on the information you provide. I can even insert photos you provide. Turn around time is just 2 days from the time I get your electronic money transfer. There is no need for an actual site visit. After reviewing many other inspector's reports, I can't believe they ever visited the site. Many mills also seem to be declining claims without an actual site visit, so this is not a unique concept.

I fully expect most of the claims to be the result of installer error, mostly insufficient subfloor prep. Some may be attributed to unrealistic expectations of the end user. A few could even be locally caused, like swollen plank edges on a laminate floor. None will be a product defect recognized by the manufacturer, so you won't have to subject yourself to that whole futile process.

In the unlikely event that it is later determined that the report's conclusion is wrong, I will refund the full amount to you. I anticipate getting it wrong less than 10% of the time."

This satirical piece pretty much describes the way claims are being handled today.

If you need help or guidance before a project begins to keep you out of trouble or answers after a flooring failure occurs, call us. We can help, we have answers, and we have a team of experts unparalleled in the industry.

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## Leapfrogging: A Not-So-Best Practice for Concrete Moisture Testing

If you're like most of us, you look for shortcuts when faced with an important task. Sometimes the shortcut works; sometimes it backfires terribly.

Ever take a shortcut across the mountains that ended up costing you a lot of time because of the road's painfully slow curves?

It's no different with the in-situ [relative humidity \(RH\) test](#) for concrete moisture.

Sometimes people who use reusable RH sensors for their testing instead of single-use sensors are tempted to "leapfrog" the sensors from one test hole to the next. This practice is NOT recommended because it runs counter to the guidelines spelled out in the ASTM F2170 standard for RH testing. Even so, some people are convinced that leapfrogging gives them a sensible shortcut that will save time and money when assessing the moisture condition of a concrete slab.

The problem is, leapfrogging RH sensors won't really save time and money at all.



Inaccurate test results from leapfrogging could lead to bad decisions about when to install, and that could mean a costly flooring failure.

In fact, people who try leapfrogging run the risk of getting inaccurate test results. And that could lead to a bad decision about when to install the finished floor, which could mean a costly, catastrophic flooring failure—one such as buckling, crowning, cupping, cracking, discoloration, mold, delamination or mildew.

### What is Leapfrogging?

In a nutshell, leapfrogging happens when reusable RH sensors are moved from one hole to another, typically without allowing sufficient time for the air within the hole to acclimate to the conditions in the concrete. It is generally done when the person performing the test has fewer RH sensors than they really need to conduct the test correctly.

Acclimation can take many hours. And waiting that long is sure to test one's patience. Much easier to just take the RH reading and move the sensor to the next hole in the slab.

What could be the harm in that, right?

Well, if you don't allow enough time for acclimation of the air in the hole to occur, you run the risk of getting RH readings that are too low, which will suggest that the concrete is drier than it really is.

Of course, inaccurate or misleading test results defeat the entire purpose of doing RH testing!

You want to use a concrete moisture test that's scientifically proven for accuracy and reliability, and that means going with RH testing. Studies at Lund University in Sweden and elsewhere have clearly shown that [taking RH measurements at 40% depth](#) (for a slab drying from one side) will reliably indicate the amount of concrete moisture the finished floor product will "see" after it is installed.

### **Leapfrogging: Does it Adhere to ASTM F2170 Guidelines?**

The ASTM F2170 standard was developed to ensure that people follow a consistent method for RH testing so they will get accurate test results. Please realize that leapfrogging without waiting the necessary amount of time goes *against* ASTM F2170 guidelines.

The guidelines specify that you drill the test hole, drop in the sleeve, and cap off the hole for 24 hours. This allows for acclimation to occur. After the 24-hour wait, you come back, remove the cap, and drop in the sensor.

When you do this, you are bringing the sensor from an unacclimated environment, and the sensor is pushing out the acclimated air into the environment. So, after placing the sensor, you need to cap off the hole again and let the air re-acclimate before taking true RH readings.

This will generally take many hours—assuming your goal is to obtain an accurate RH reading. Then, and only then, should you remove the sensor and place it into another test hole to start the process all over.

You can see that if you don't have enough sensors, and the slab is large enough that you're conducting a lot of tests (for example, 12 tests needed for a 10,000 square-foot slab), then this could take a lot of time.

Kind of a catch-22—when you have fewer reusable sensors than you really need for the test. If you conduct your test using reusable sensors per F2170 guidelines, you can expect the testing to eat up a lot of your time. But resort to leapfrogging and you risk inaccurate numbers that you shouldn't be relying on.

Fortunately, there is an easy solution!

### When Leapfrogging is Not a Problem

Leapfrogging is never a problem when [using single-use sensors](#). These sensors are extremely fast and easy to use. They are installed once and left in the hole for the entire time of the test. Because they are never removed and transferred to another hole, there's no temptation to leapfrog single-use sensors.



Leapfrogging is never a problem when using single-use RH sensors because they don't get removed and transferred to another test hole.

Even better, once you've waited the required 24 hours for acclimation to occur, you can come back to take your initial reading and as many repeat readings as you want without additional wait time. That's because the single-use RH sensor is always there, always acclimated, always ready.

Now you know why most people who do RH testing go with single-use sensors. Leapfrogging reusable sensors sounds great—until you know the risks. And why take chances on ruining your flooring project?

For more information about concrete moisture testing and the advantages of using a single-use RH sensor, visit [WagnerMeters.com](http://WagnerMeters.com) to learn more or call worldwide, toll-free at 800-207-2214.





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