

CFR The Commercial Flooring Report

For the Commercial Floor Covering Industry

Volume 166 - July 2022

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Claims, Testing and Technology

It seems as though dealing with major claims is becoming more and more complex and contentious. Of course, you have to understand that no manufacturer is going to just roll over and replace thousands of feet of flooring material on your say so when you have a claim or complaint. Don't delude yourself into thinking that's ever going to happen. If it does, you've just experienced a miracle. Most often you'll have to go through the process of fielding the concern or complaint, go look at it yourself, and determine if you own it or not, and then decide your next course of action.

It is common to talk with a commercial flooring contractor about a claim that they're not sure if they caused it, but they are more than willing to step up and fix a problem they may have created. On the other hand, when you know you did nothing wrong, or don't think you did, and you believe it is a product problem, your first step is to contact the manufacturer, if they really are one, and file a claim. A handful of large commercial flooring manufacturers will actually have a field tech person on staff that will travel to look at the concern to try and determine what's wrong and why. Firms that aren't really manufacturers, and there are many of them today just brokering vinyl plank and tile, may have no one other than a salesperson that doesn't really understand the technical aspects of the product. After that you may have to call in a professional to help determine exactly what's wrong, why, who's at fault and how to fix it. That professional should be someone with industry clout.

Professional flooring contractors have been down this road before and know how to deal with it. They either take responsibility for the problem if they realize it's theirs, or know how to handle the process with their supplier. If they are members of Fuse or Starnet, they have the added influence of those organizations. If you're reading this and you're not a member of either one of those groups, you should look into the benefits of membership. Not only do you reap the rewards of what the group has to offer buying products, but you get the more important benefit of being able to communicate with other members who may be having the same problem as you or have answers to a challenge you may be dealing with.



As we move to the next topic, I want to reiterate something I preach often, that is the flooring never lies, it will always tell you what's wrong if you know how to interpret what it's saying. Just like Forensic science, the evidence never lies. People lie, but never the evidence. The evidence is what it is, and words won't change that, nor will trying to interpret what the evidence is saying to make it fit your position. And if someone doesn't know what they're looking at they are not going to know what the real problem is. On a commercial flooring claim you need a solid answer not an opinion or an appears to be.

When you're looking at a flooring problem you can't just look at it, you must see through it to understand what's going on. You also must be able to interpret the evidence being exhibited and what influencers are at play to make the flooring do what it's doing. With that you also must have an intimate knowledge of the material you're looking at, be it carpet, vinyl flooring, wood, rubber, concrete, or components used with them. There must also be an understanding of the science at play with chemistry and physics. In addition, the environment can also be a factor in creating a flooring problem or failure. Another factor not considered often is what the information on the product says and if it makes sense and if the product can really do what the information says it can. One more is the installation instructions. Do they make sense, or did someone just cut and paste something? Once it's determined as to whether it's the flooring or something influencing it that caused the problem, the next step is how to fix it. We are expert at that, since we can always answer the "what went wrong and why" and as a result determine the corrective action to be taken to resolve the problem. There is always a reason why and a fix. There is also always a way that the failure or problem could have been prevented. Remember, we're dealing with flooring here, not rocket science or brain surgery. It ain't all that complicated, but it's not that simple either if you don't understand it. You must know to know. But the flooring contractor, manufacturer, general contractor, architect, end user or even the attorneys don't know all they should about the products. It's not just about making the flooring, selling it and installing it, but whether or not it will do what is expected of it where it's going to be used.

And then there's all the ancillary products that are used with the flooring such as, moisture mitigation systems, floor prep materials, joint sealers, tools, and adhesive. By the way, adhesive by one definition is "a substance used for sticking objects or materials together." Adhesive will not stop a flooring material from lifting, curling, cupping, doming, shrinking, or expanding. That all has to do with the flooring material itself. Adhesive will also not stop the effects of moisture and alkalinity in a concrete slab, regardless of what anybody tells you. Before you believe that they will, read the fine print and learn a bit about chemistry. The adhesive itself may be resistant to moisture but using it in lieu of a moisture mitigation system because it's cheaper and easier, will not guarantee there won't be a failure. We deal with these failures regularly. I just saw an adhesive maker tout that they never had a claim on their moisture mitigating product and we've had a least five of them for the stuff – and have pictures to prove it. Nothing is 100%, nothing.

Today, more than ever, we're seeing misinformation being spewed about like its gospel. Everybody's an expert and, in many cases, the



THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT

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inmates have taken over the asylum. We've got a case now where the guy whose product caused the problem is being allowed to drive the bus to crazy town to run the show. His audience, being the architect, general contractor, and end user, are listening to this idiot. We've advised our client, the flooring contractor, to walk away from the job since no matter what happens, if there's any problem at all with the flooring after this charade, he's going to get the blame for it. The writing is clearly on the wall. Fortunately, he contacted us for guidance before being sucked into the dark abyss on this job.

TESTING

Now I want to share some information on testing flooring materials to try to replicate or determine if they are defective. Know that the ASTM tests are written, and the standards are developed by committees of relevant industry professionals, many are representatives of the manufacturers.

Since the industry is plagued with vinyl plank and tile problems let's look at the test that is most commonly used for dimensional change. That would be shrinking, which results in gaps at the ends or sides of the vinyl plank, and there is a planar component of the test as well.

The ASTM F1700 is the test for solid vinyl floor tile. Within F1700 are several tests, one being F2199. Test method F2199 for dimensional stability, which also has the planar change measurement in the method, states when tested in accordance with the method, the tile shall not change in linear dimension more than 0.020 inches/12 inches, maximum. For vinyl plank the pieces tested are a minimum of 12 inches long. If you have gapping at the ends of planks on the floor, that gap constitutes the result of each plank shrinking. F2199 may be used to address that type of issue, and with a listed maximum criterion published in the F1700 standard, will lend itself to more readily assisting in claims.

The test is used to show the potential of shrinkage based on heat aging. There is no direct correlation between how much it has shrunk in the test to actual measures of what will occur in situ. (At the installation site), the test results could be much worse or much better. The test is the test and is not to be construed as real life. It would indicate if the material exceeded the

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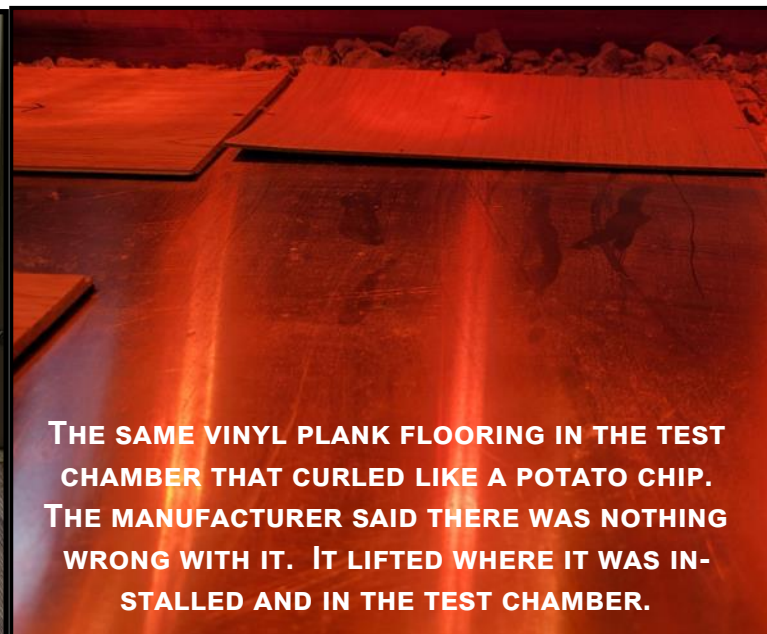
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maximum, that the real-life usage will likely show an issue of shrinkage.

This was a response from a large vinyl flooring manufacturer who apparently has no interest in honoring claims. They felt the ASTM F2199 test, one of the standards used to test vinyl tile flooring, was not a relevant test for their vinyl plank tile product. This is a product we recently tested for a flooring contractor that curled like a potato chip in the test chamber. I love how manufacturers, or pseudo manufacturers, sometimes interpret tests that either do or don't fit their agenda. You can't bend the rules to make them fit your answer. And, again, words don't change the laws of physics, chemistry, or science. Vinyl flooring is all about chemistry and physics. And remember, the evidence (flooring) never lies. Again, ASTM standards are developed by committees of relevant industry professionals to determine voluntary consensus standards. Most of the manufacturers of these products are on the committees. By denying the irrefutable results of the test in this case, their denial was contradictory to the manufacturer's participation on the committee and being a party to the test standard.

Language that we use when testing is that it must be noted that the samples received for testing, even if we've harvested them from the jobsite attic stock, represent a small portion of the overall product installed at the job site and may not have the same attributes of the installed material. They may or may not reflect the specific characteristics of the concern conditions being exhibited. Further, testing is conducted according to ASTM or specific test protocols, in a limited time frame and does not replicate job site conditions or time. The product on the floor where it is installed is the actual afflicted victim. The product tested may not do the same thing as what the installed product does. So, you must go back to the evidence at the scene of the crime. And this is true of any flooring product or material.



Not all vinyl tile and plank are the same, and not all vinyl tile and plank is the same all the time from the same supplier. Since these products are mostly produced in Asia, where there are hundreds of manufacturers, the ultimate supplier may be sourcing from more than one producer, which makes what they get, and what you get, different. Even if there is a one source producer, they may outsource to keep up with demand or fill a large order, which means all the products are not always the same from what you believe to be the same source. This is especially true in China where they also do a lot of hot press annealing to stabilize stress in the product. If they are busy, they'll outsource the hot press process which can make the product different. It may look the same on the face but beneath the surface layer there may be significant differences in the make up or processing of the product -things you'll never see or know about. These differences can result in the planar and dimensional stability issues you see

after the product is installed. Korean production is mostly integrated, and those manufacturers typically don't outsource their production. A Large commercial order should be produced at one time and the lots should not be mixed, but this doesn't always happen therefore you can get some materials on a job distorting, lifting or shrinking, have shade or sheen variation in the product or performance issues in the same order. If you understand the manufacturing, logistics and sourcing process of these products, figuring out what's wrong with the product and why will answer the questions for you and help you understand what's going on and why. To determine what's wrong and why, you must know. There can be no guessing or opinions. Too many people who say they know don't. You want someone to help



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you with answers that really knows. We do. We spot trends in flooring product problems because we talk to flooring contractors, general contractors, and commercial end users all over the country daily. We also work with construction attorneys regularly on large commercial projects all over the country. If a manufacturer tells you they don't have any problems with a product, ask us because we're probably involved with more than one of these non-existent product problems.

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Information tid bit:

Did you know that the term LVT originally meant Layered Vinyl Tile, which is what the product is? That term morphed into Luxury Vinyl Tile or Plank.

**Now LET'S DISCUSS
 FLOORCLOUD**

Let's look at some amazing new technology you should know about that can make controlling job site conditions and avoiding flooring material and installation failures fade away. This technology not only benefits the flooring contractor but the general contractor as well. That technology is Floorcloud.

WHAT DOES THE FLOORCLOUD TECHNOLOGY DO?

Floorcloud is a jobsite quality management software for the flooring industry. It is a cloud-based, software platform (SaaS) utilizing mobile devices (phones, tablets & IoT environmental sensors) and a proprietary database of manufacturer's product specifications to easily monitor, communicate and archive essential data to improve installation outcomes. Floorcloud provides real-time, jobsite data insights which lead to fast issue identification and resolution. It also maintains secure, organized records of key project information for future retrieval.

KEY BENEFITS OF FLOORCLOUD

- Enhances & standardizes onsite quality assurance with installation personnel.
- Provides exceptional jobsite climate conditions visibility and alerts synchronized to a database of manufacturer product specifications.
- Simplifies record keeping (climate data, alerts, communications, photos, notes, documents, batch and lot numbers).
- Installation & safety reminders at point of use.

Floorcloud allows you to improve flooring installation quality management. Obtain real-time visibility of jobsite climate conditions and receive alerts synchronized to a proprietary database of manufacturer's product specifications. With Floorcloud you can meet the demands of the active space, requiring the adherence to manufacturers' ambient conditions specifications during the acclimation period and throughout the entire installation.

The Floorcloud system enables the jobsite to be monitored in real-time, remotely and precisely, 24/7/365. It also would provide a cloud-based, secure digital vault for the flooring contractor to store important data-graphs, photos, and other significant information about the installation. This technology will allow flooring contractors and general contractors to strategically plan and perform work and modify production schedules that could jeopardize the installation and projects outcome.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Floorcloud sensors are mounted on walls to provide hourly quality control recordings of ambient temperatures, relative humidity, and dew point. The technology will give alert notifications so that ambient conditions can be brought into the flooring manufacturers specification range. This not only benefits the flooring but also other construction materials.

This technology can be used as a unique selling proposition when bidding on jobs or in the actual process of controlling installation site conditions. And it eliminates the guesswork of whether or not

conditions are right for installation. The intuitive photo and note capture functions document key information pertaining to product batch codes, the status of jobsite conditions such as room availability, lighting conditions, substrate quality, flooring protection, and the work of other trades.

Another excellent function that Floorcloud's desktop applications provide is the ability to generate customized reports using content from the projects job file. This feature enables contractors to create professional pdf reports of ambient condition graphs, display the percentage of time flooring products are in or out of the manufacturer's specification range, and include important photos and notes about the jobsite. This now takes only a few minutes versus hours.

This is technology you should have to lessen the chances of a flooring failure due to out of spec ambient conditions at the installation site. Click the below ad for Floorcloud to get more information and to invest in the system.



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