

CFR The Commercial Flooring Report

For the Commercial Floor Covering Industry

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Appearance Retention

What is it and Why is it Important

What is Appearance retention? In reference to flooring it is the ability of a flooring material or product to retain its original aesthetics - which is its beauty and look - color, and construction integrity. Basically, it is the flooring materials ability to resist uglying out for a reasonable period of time. That reasonable time frame is whatever is expected or accepted by the end user which would be a number of years. That is also based on how the product is used, what it is, where it is installed and how it is maintained and what is expected of it. The color, style, construction, and quality of the product, whether hard or soft surface, must also be considered. And, most important, is whether or not the flooring material is appropriate for the application, essentially, is it merchantable for service and fit for the intended purpose of use where it is going to be installed and used.



Every commercial end user expects that the considerable investment in their new flooring is going to be amortized over several years. Depending on where the flooring is installed, time is a variable element. Any premature change in the flooring's appearance is used to gauge its performance and appearance retention, as measured by the expectations of the end user. Those expectations are based in part by statements made from product information, the salesperson, architect, designer, or specifier. Simply put, if the end users' expectations are not met, and there is a failure prior to that, you've just stepped in the slop. Loss of appearance is almost always equated to a problem with the flooring product and seldom does anyone want to, nor are they willing to accept the fact that they chose the wrong product - knowingly or not.

The Products – Soft and Hard

Gauging appearance retention for commercial carpet is rather easy. There are laboratory tests that can be conducted that will determine how well a carpet will or should perform. The test rating is typically based on a 1 to 5 scale and range from no change to severe change. There are also carpet industry guidelines for appearance retention that have been developed by the Carpet and Rug Institute that identify the level of appearance change of a carpet surface resulting from foot traffic. As for carpet, it is rather easy to build a product with measurable construction specifications that will deliver high performance. With carpet the key to performance is density. That density is achieved by stitch rate, gauge,

pile height, yarn twist, backing, and the addition of a densified cushion backing such as attached polyurethane, all of which can be measured. We did this with the carpet at the Portland Oregon Airport, probably the most highly engineered textile broadloom carpet product ever produced. The performance criteria for that carpet are one of a kind. I know because we developed that carpet with J&J, the Port of Portland and Henneberry Eddy, the architectural firm. The carpet was inspected at the end of every run, any issues corrected and then inspected a second time. And every run of the product was rigorously tested prior to it being shipped to insure it met the specs we wrote.

Hard surface flooring, especially vinyl plank and tile of any variety, is not as easy to measure for performance but there is also an appearance test method for resilient flooring. After being subjected to the test the specimens are given a rating by the observers based on scores for gloss, color, surface texture, and restorative maintenance. Hard surface flooring materials are not easy to gauge as they are coming from all over the world containing different components, from different manufacturers, with different factories, having different equipment and standards. For example, an SPC core product may have a coarse of fine ground stone component, or the cores make up can vary or any number of things that you can't see and certainly can't measure may exist, all hiding in plain sight. Not so with carpet. With carpet everything can be measured and seen – there ain't much to hide. Well, maybe some stuff in the backing but that can be figured out too.

As for visual performance, appearance retention is normally associated with foot traffic but any change in the product, be it physical or color related or soiling - basically anything the end user thinks is different from when the product was installed or contrary to their expectations - can be deemed an appearance change. Some of those issues are matting or crushing of the carpet face, fading, discoloration, pattern walk out, soiling, or not being able to get the flooring clean. For hard surface you can have scuffing, dulling, loss of pattern, scratching, discoloration, contamination from walk off – yellowing and indentation and weird things happening under the floor telegraphing through from the substrate. If any of these issues, or more, occur within a matter of months after installation, you have a problem. Who are they coming to first with their complaint? Of course, it will be the last people that had anything to do with the flooring and that's the flooring contractor. This is one area that installation won't likely get the blame, but it is used of course. Like the act of installation could cause the flooring to discolor in traffic areas – it can't.



THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT

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The surface of the product will influence how the flooring looks when used. Influencing flooring characteristics are flat, glossy or matte finishes, textured or smooth, color – one of the most critical elements in appearance retention, particularly with carpet, patterning and product construction all affect appearance retention. The key element at the installation site is who is judging the appearance of the flooring and the change that may be taking place. Here is a fact that can't be disputed, if the end user thinks there is an appearance change in their eyes, then there is one. As crazy as you may think they are when you look at the complaint, you have to see it through their eyes. Their opinion and position is going to be based on what they thought they were going to get and their expectations for how the flooring product should look. If it doesn't look the way they think it should after a short period of time, someone did not pay attention to what was expected, didn't ask, didn't care and may have assumed something they shouldn't have. Like all relationships, specifying and selling commercial flooring has to involve two sides, the giver and receiver. If there is a disconnect between the parties, especially on the givers side (the person selling or specifying the product) then the receiver (the person who is buying the flooring) is not going to be happy. The question you have to ask when selling or specifying a commercial flooring product is if the product being specified is properly suited for the application? It's incumbent upon whoever that is, be it the architect, flooring rep, flooring contractors salesperson or the designer, to determine whether or not the product they are showing is going to work where it is being installed. If the complaint after installation carries the words, "we hate the way this flooring looks" then you have a problem that is going to be very difficult to resolve. I'm sure you've heard the words, "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder" well, ugly out for flooring is also in the eyes of the beholder.

You have to qualify the commercial flooring product for the application and that's based on levels of use, which have been around since I got in the industry over 50 years ago. The levels of use, based on traffic, are: Light, Moderate, Heavy and Extra Heavy. There is always a flooring product, soft and hard, that will perform in each of these categories.

If the project is a renovation you have to ask, "what did you like about the old flooring, what didn't you like and what are your expectations?" Today, many of the renovated spaces are going from carpet to a hard surface flooring and most often vinyl tile or plank. I will tell you, working in the drain of the sewer of the industry like we



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New vinyl tile flooring that is discoloring from tracked in asphalt.

Soft soled shoes will hold the oil and track and transfer it as well. Two contributors to the discoloration. And vinyl will absorb the asphaltic material. This also happens with carpet as these products are all derived from oil, so they have an affinity (attraction) to the asphalt. Once it is absorbed it is not coming out. Anything strong enough to remove some of the asphalt will destroy the vinyl.

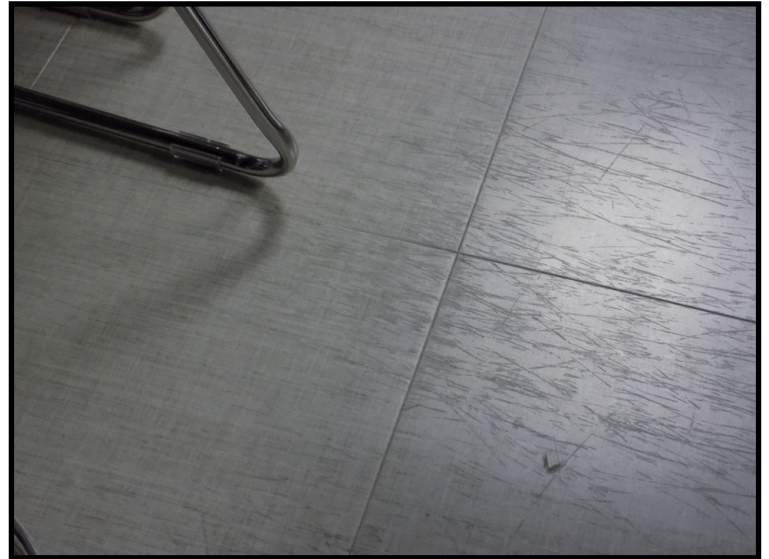
do, there is a lot of crappy vinyl flooring out there being installed that is defective out of the box. It's the gift that keeps on giving for us but the toxic drink that creates sickness for everyone else.

The pictures you'll see in this issue, which are cases we've been involved in around the country, are of flooring products that the end user expected to perform and not change in appearance. Unfortunately, all of them changed and uglier out, shortly after being installed and each of them created a fit for the end user, or the flooring contractor or the specifier or the designer.

Do yourself a favor, no matter what position you hold in the industry, if you have a flooring project that you don't want to have a problem with, contact us. Whether it be with concrete, carpet, wood, vinyl, tile, or any type flooring, we'll help you stay out of trouble. And, if you're already staring at the barrel of the gun waiting to blow your brains out because you're being blamed for a flooring failure, call us. We can always tell you what went wrong, why, who's at fault (we don't care who that is, we're only interested in the truth) and most importantly, how to fix it. No one knows like LGM.



Carpet in an office building being soiled due to soapy residue from the cleaning process they were using. The small piece is new carpet shown as comparison. Fortunately, we were able to have this issued resolved by one of our cleaning associates who was then able to keep the carpet properly maintained.



Vinyl tile in a school sold as a non-scratch finish, that didn't live up to the hype. Interestingly in this case, the tile in the classrooms didn't perform at all for long, but a different style of the same product in the corridors experienced no scratching at all.



A natural flooring product with the surface finish wearing off. A new coating was applied that didn't work either.



Wood flooring in luxury condos with the finish coming off. This was a very defective product involving a multi-million-dollar lawsuit that we won for our client. We went molecular on this one to prove the product was defective.



Yellow, so pretty until it isn't. And this carpet went south in a hurry. On the left the original carpet. On the right a replacement piece that made the end user, a luxury hotel, aware of how faded the original carpet was. Yellow is the worst color for carpet. There's a chart that shows that below.

**Color Reflectance:
The Key to Soil Visibility**

The way a particular color value reflects light will determine how much visible contrast it has to accumulated soil. With few exceptions, there are values that yield acceptable and optimum reflectance ratings for each major color group. Compare your proposed carpet color to the gradations on this scale and note the corresponding number rating to determine how well it will perform in hiding soil.

Dark

On the surface, dark colors might appear to be excellent soil hidiers, but they're not. Because darker colors offer sharp contrasts, lint, dust and light-colored soils show up more readily on them. **Note: Colors such as yellow and orange have no dark range.**

Optimum

The reflectance ratings of colors in this range yield the highest soil-hiding characteristics. This is the ideal range to most effectively reduce the visible effects of soiling and staining. **Note: Certain colors, such as yellow, have no optimum range.**

Acceptable

Colors in this range effectively hide soil contrasts and, to a degree, mask the presence of soil.

Light

Light colors obviously show soil more readily than medium colors. Although light colors may be aesthetically pleasing, they may require more maintenance to retain original appearance.

Note: This guide applies only to the range of color as shown on the chart at right. Antron® is a DuPont registered trademark.



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