

CFR The Commercial Flooring Report

For the Commercial Floor Covering Industry

Volume 175 - April 2023

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A Return to Luxury Vinyl Plank and Tile Flooring

SEE PAGE 5

EXCITING MESSAGE

FROM



These products have swept the flooring industry and market like no other product in history. It's an anomaly that no other flooring product in the industry has ever caused – not even Stainmaster. It's also one of the most confusing and hardest products to put your finger on because of all the variations and characteristics of the product and the constant changes it has and is undergoing. Those changes include dense PVC cores, magnesium oxide cores, hybrid core materials, PVC free products, enhanced wear layers, direct digital printing and embossing and the list goes on and continues to evolve. The changes are constant and seemingly never ending. It's a chore not only to try to keep up with these products but to know what they are and how they are made by just looking at them. Everything about them is hiding in plain sight. On top of that no big or small flooring manufacturer or entity selling these products makes 100% of them. Much of this flooring is still sourced from overseas, primarily China, where there are hundreds of manufacturers, and other locations in the Far East with some other scattered locations around the world. Only recently has manufacturing of vinyl plank and tile come to the US, almost exclusively in the Dalton, GA, area, "The Carpet Capital of the World" and almost all of the products manufactured here are solid core.



Photo courtesy of Daily Citizens News

As commercial entities in the industry you deal primarily with flexible vinyl tile and plank which are for the most part glued down. Some of it is made for loose lay which, in my opinion, may be good for multifamily type applications but I'm a firm believer that if you're going to install a commercial flooring product like this it should be stuck to a properly prepared substrate. I cringe at the thought of putting some of the rigid core products in commercial applications, and never like to see a floating installation. Commercial flooring must offer high performance, especially where there are rolling loads or heavy traffic. Another scary thought is the increasing amount of PVC free flooring that uses bio-based or recyclable ingredients.



Commercial Installation—Loose Lay LVP—Flexible 5.0mm

Inherent Doming Relative to Planar Instability

Most of the recycled content in the commercial products is post industrial. It's very difficult to control the feed stock in post industrial materials. Even recycling waste from the manufacturing process more than once can have a compromising effect on the product. PVC free is being implemented to avoid dangerous chemicals being used in these flooring products. But what effect are they going to have on the flooring? Does anybody really know yet? And are the alternative chemicals being used any safer than what's been used? No answers there yet either. We had this issue years ago when the carpet tile manufacturers all started using post recycled content in their backings and it created havoc in the industry with unstable product. We're seeing that again now. Of course, the blame for that will come back to the flooring contractor or installer first. You're always the guinea pigs for something new and different that fails on the floor having not been vetted properly or at all, or having no empirical test data to back up the claims made by whoever happens to be making or selling the product. But the demand for green products in the commercial market will drive the industry to comply. And when these products fail and must be ripped up and sent to the landfill where they will languish forever, there's nothing green about that. I'll repeat this statement that I've used many times, "Get it in the door and keep it on the floor" is as green as it gets.

Simply put, you have no idea what these products are made with, how they're made and processed and where they come from.

Let me give you an example. A flooring is ordered for installation on a commercial project and sold under the same name and description by the manufacturer. Once installed, the flooring fails. What wasn't known is that the flooring was manufactured in different facilities, under different conditions, with differing materials. The installer would have no earthly idea of this but would get blamed for the failure. Flooring installers assume the products they are installing are first quality and uniform in manufacture and not defective. They don't test the products and they aren't quality control for the materials they work with. Unless the product exhibits obvious flaws or distortions that would cause them concern so as not to proceed with the installation, they are going to install it, as would be expected. The installers can't retroactively cause the material to morph into different shapes or sizes.

Consider also that during Covid, and still to varying degrees, raw material shortages caused manufacturers to scramble to find alternatives to components used to make these products, and to value manufacture them. These conditions will have an effect on the products that won't be seen until they are installed. And with everybody and his brother jumping into the fray to sell these products, without being manufacturers of them, and without any knowledge of them, the market is at the mercy of the suppliers.



THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT

Lewis G. Migliore—President

P: 706.370.5888 or Email: lgmtcs@optilink.us

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Page Layout By: Anita S. Drennon

Let me reference an enlightening article in the January 2023 issue of Floor Covering News entitled “Shoddy SPC takes its toll on the market” comments being referenced are from those in the industry. “influx of inferior product”, “scrambling to make their products cheaper”, “They don’t know how to manufacture the product. “They’re the ones having quality issues”, “though everybody says SPC is waterproof, it’s not if you use the wrong ingredients”, “you can’t tell the difference until it’s been installed and it’s in the application for a while”, “can’t differentiate---because it’s all in the formula”, “The low quality is coming from everywhere, including the USA”. There is no questioning this.

Take a look at some of the installation instructions on these products as well. Everyone says the products have to be acclimated but there are a bunch of “manufacturers” that say you don’t have to acclimate. And I love this statement, “If the floor has some imperfections, rigid core is a perfect solution. It will not show those undulations and imperfections in the flooring.” Really? Until there’s a failure and the substrate not being level or prepped properly is said to be the cause.

There are so many contradictions in so many installation guidelines that you have to wonder if whoever wrote them or approved them had any knowledge of the product at all. And for the renegade suppliers of these products, they likely just cut and pasted from something they found online that sounded good to them.

Almost all of what we do is focused on the commercial flooring market, but we also service retail flooring dealers as well and get calls and emails from them daily. This I share with you to emphasize the pickle I think the industry has gotten itself into on the hard surface side. A retailer called with a vinyl plank flooring problem; one she’s had several times. She’s at her wits end over this. And the statement that was most profound was that she’s afraid to open her store in the morning because she’s concerned she’ll get another call for a complaint on this product. Have we come to this, where you have to be afraid to sell a product because it jeopardizes your business? God, I hope not.

Now, after the doom and gloom of this bleak issue, let’s see some light. Do business with manufacturers and suppliers you can trust. Work with them so they’ll work with you. And trust but verify. If something



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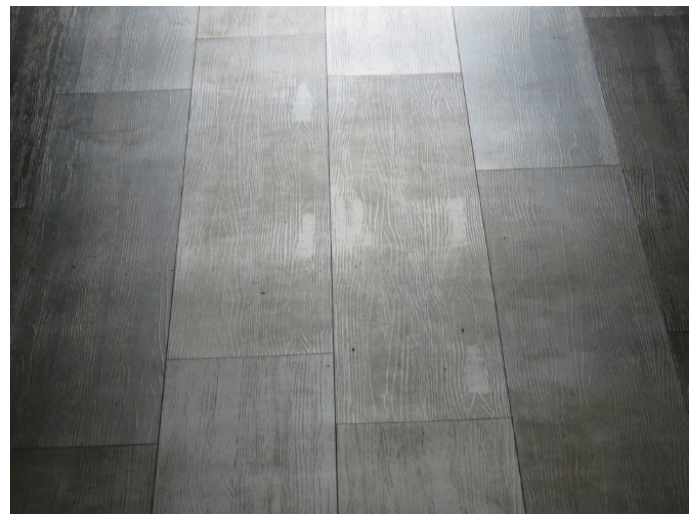


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Three Lots of What is Supposed to be the Same Product but Each Lot Has a Different Core



SPC Ridged Core—Polyurethane Wear Layer Inconsistencies

sounds too good to be true it probably is. And if you have any questions on flooring issues, from concrete to carpet, contact us. We always have the answers, and that's a fact.

 **UNITE** Floor Training Alliance has an exciting message for you on the next page!!

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Sonny Callaham to head the Training and Education Committee for UNITE



ROCKWALL, Texas (April 7, 2023) – Robert Varden, president and CEO of UNITE Floor Training Alliance, announced that Sonny Callaham, co-founder and chair of the National Association of Floor Covering Technicians, will head up the UNITE Training and Education committee. Joining Callahan is Kevin Keefe, National Technical Sales Manager, QEP Roberts; Lew Migliore, Founder and President, LGM and Associates; and Bart Bettiga, Executive Director of National Tile Contractors Association.

“The mission of the Training and Education committee is to invite and get to know training entities who wish to partner with UNITE,” said Varden. “The committee will evaluate various training organizations to ensure they are professional training entities that we would recommend to both professional installers looking to continue their education and skills improvement, as well as training the next generation of professionals.”

UNITE Floor Training Alliance is a non-profit organization dedicated to raising professionalism for existing installers through training and education and finding the next generation of floor covering installers by connecting them to resources for financial aid and certified programs across the U.S.

For more information, contact Robert Varden at rvarden@uniteflooring.org



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