

CFR The Commercial Flooring Report

For the Commercial Floor Covering Industry

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The Constant Changes in Concrete and Some Nonsensical Ideas

Changes in flooring products and in the flooring industry in general are changing faster than anyone can keep up with. Changes in the concrete industry are occurring even faster. If you pay attention to what's happening with concrete, and we do, you'd soon realize that the new concrete substrates you will be installing flooring on are like nothing anyone has experienced before, not even the concrete industry.

What effects these changes will have on flooring installation, adhesives, and the flooring material no one knows.

Honestly, what you should know is that the concrete industry does not care about the flooring industry and the flooring industry does not care about the concrete industry. Both are looking out for themselves, their products, and their industry, which is normal and to be expected. They are not looking out for the flooring contractor or installer which is why you should be. Both industries are instituting changes in their materials to comply with green, sustainability and struggling to be carbon neutral.



The flooring contractor and installer are shooting at a moving target, with new concrete and flooring materials, which are illusive because they are constantly changing and evolving, and you have no idea of the changes or how they will affect the installation or the flooring product. Neither does the flooring manufacturer or concrete industry. If you think flooring manufacturers are concerned about all the changes in concrete or if they're aware of them or even care, or actually have someone who truly understands concrete, you're deluding yourself. And how do they put numbers or warranties on their products when concrete and concrete conditions vary with every job and every truck load? Where's the empirical test data to back up the sales statements on their products? Did you ever think of asking these questions? We do, but we don't get any answers, and neither will you. On top of this, most of the hard surface flooring being sold and installed is coming from overseas, where they definitely are not overseeing concrete changes in the US. The fact that almost 85% of the hard surface products being sold are made overseas should come as no surprise if you read any of the flooring industry trade publications, which you to must keep up with what's going on. If the industry doesn't know all they should about the slew of products being sold, how are you supposed to?

Adhesive manufacturers and underlayment manufacturers are more attuned to what's happening in the concrete industry than the flooring manufacturer or suppliers because their products must work with and on concrete. Remember this, every flooring product works until it doesn't and, unfortunately, there will always come that time for somebody.



Courtesy of Schönox

We make it a point to stay as up to date as possible on changes with concrete design, mixtures, and additives and that's a challenge. In addition, the basic materials in concrete will vary depending on where you are in the country as the main components are locally sourced.

So, what are the changes being made to concrete? There is greater use of fly ash in concrete, up to 40%, and there are different kinds of fly ash and differences in the fly ash itself depending on where and how it was derived. There are new and varying additives being tested for concrete, including coffee beans which are being pyrolyzed to take the place of sand in the concrete. There are a slew of other materials and stuff being tried to help cure, place, strengthen, improve, and modify concrete that the concrete industry itself doesn't know yet what effect they will have on concrete. And how are you supposed to know or tell? There is great concern for the decarbonization of concrete and a replacement for Portland cement. Making concrete consumes a lot of energy. Clinker, which is the backbone of cement production, is essentially a mix of limestone and minerals that have been heated in a kiln and have been transformed by heat. When limestone is converted to clinker, CO2 is released. Alternatives for clinkers are being sought. Other alternative components for evolving concrete would retain more water. Glycol is also being used in concrete, the same stuff as in anti-freeze. It is often added to concrete as a self-curing or shrinkage-reducing agent. This chemical absorbs water and keeps things wet. It is also a surfactant or a soap. There may be surfactants in the adhesive being used for installing flooring. How do you think the use of this chemical may affect a flooring installation? Are you going to know if it's there? Nope. The scary part is that this type of product may also be applied after concrete is poured and this would not be something you'd want to try and stick anything to.



THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT

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Glass is also being used in concrete. The process of using glass generates pozzolans through a patented process called Pozzotive, and the final material can replace up to 50% of cement in concrete.

How any of these or other changes will affect the flooring installation is anybody's guess. Mind you, these changes are only going to occur with new concrete. Old concrete is what it is, which offers its own challenges on every concrete substrate you install on because there are no two alike.

Tip: So, you're in the loop, you should try to be a part of the pre-construction meetings where you'll be able to partake in what's going on and talk to the concrete guys about what you need for a successful flooring installation. The GC would be on board with this as it would be of benefit to them as well. Remember: "If you don't ask, you don't get."

At a recent event one of the speakers told the attendees to get the concrete mix design information before starting a job. You won't find that information on an existing structure you're installing flooring on, and good luck getting that information on a new pour. If you do, you won't be able to determine anything from it or how any of the materials in the concrete may affect the flooring or the installation of it. And it's not your responsibility to check the concrete mix design unless it is stated in your contract, which it wouldn't be or shouldn't be. You are not concrete experts and shouldn't be considered as such. We have associates that are concrete experts that can help with that. It's more than doubtful flooring guys are going to know what they're looking at and what the information means or tells you.

You're probably more paranoid now that you've read this. But fear not, LGM is here to help guide you through the mine field of new and varied flooring products and concrete substrate issues.

Now let's lighten it up with some nonsensical ideas we've run into lately.

It was suggested that the flooring contractor on this particular project reinstall the failed installation with a different adhesive in a situation that caused the failure – crumb rubber underlayment – and expect a different result. This was what the distributor and manufacturers rep told the flooring installers to do. Neither of them knew what they were talking about, and the manufacturers rep didn't even know his product thinking it was a floating floor instead of a flexible LVP.

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Welcome to the flooring industry where we have met the enemy, and he is us.

Glue down installation of a click system in a commercial environment is another stupid idea. This was specified by an architect. Just as you should NEVER use a floating floor installation or click system floor in a commercial installation, no matter who tells you that you can, you should never use one that's glued down. The substrate is never going to be flat enough to allow this type of flooring to work without some kind of a failure or problem. Only use flexible flooring with no rigidity like we have for years with carpet, carpet tile, sheet vinyl, vinyl tile, rubber, etc., but not something that will not conform to the substrate. You ain't never going to get it flat enough for a rigid flooring material to work. These products are creating havoc in the industry as we get calls virtually every day from a dealer or contractor with this type of product failing.



If you have a curling or lifting issue with a vinyl plank or tile product and have any leftover material, lay it out on a flat surface, like your conference table, let it relax and it will most likely exhibit lifting. That will prove the planar instability.

How about an inspector telling you that the distortion being experienced in a glue down vinyl flooring product is due to not having expansion space. We must ask, if the product is glued down why do you need expansion space? You don't do this with carpet tile, and they are vinyl backed using the same type of adhesive.

If you need help, have a question, think something you're being told is mendacity (a lie), or you absolutely must have to know what went wrong, why, who's at fault and how do you fix it. Call us - for any type of substrate or flooring material concern. We have the top experts in every category, and we always have the answers, always.

FCEF exists to bring awareness to the opportunities in a flooring installation career, recruit new talent, aid in the funding of their education, and facilitate job placement into flooring industry careers.

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Take Advantage of this!

Are you confused by all the changes occurring in the industry? Is the onslaught of new flooring products, soft and hard, adhesives, site related conditions as well as substrate issues, overwhelming you? Do you want to stay out of trouble and avoid a flooring failure? Let us help. We can come to your business with an educational program that addresses all these issues, and more. Afterwards we can engage you and your team in a question and answer session that is sure to help clear the cobwebs of chaos.

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