

CFR The Commercial Flooring Report

For the Commercial Floor Covering Industry

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Vinyl Flooring - It Used to be Simple

The world of flooring manufacturing has become a very complex chemical and physical make up. For example, when I got into the industry in 1971 vinyl products that we sold were solid tiles. The names I remember that were most common were Armstrong, Amtico, Azrock, Kentile and Congoleum. Today vinyl tiles and planks are multilayered, flexible and rigid, contain recycled content, have various fillers and stabilizers, can have varied plasticizers such as phthalates or bio based plasticizers and other components that can create compromises in the product if not controlled. None of these can be seen with the naked eye looking at the products.

Where did vinyl flooring originate?

German chemist Eugen Baumann first created polyvinyl chloride in 1872.

Vinyl tile first originated in the United States. Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) was made flexible in 1926 by Dr. Waldo Semon at the B.F. Goodrich Company in the US. Vinyl tile debuted publicly at the 1933 Chicago "A Century of Progress" Exposition before widespread commercial production after World War II.



Old Vinyl Flooring

Production scaled up rapidly across the United States and Europe during the post-World War II building boom of the late 1940s.

Production for homes took off after World War II ended, replacing older materials like rubber and linoleum.

1960s–1970s: Cushioned sheet vinyl and the first vinyl plank options were invented.

Today most hard surface flooring products are coming from all over the world from hundreds of different manufacturers using a myriad of different ingredients, components and processes. So, if you think that all this stuff is the same, think again. It may look the same, but you don't know what lurks within.

Quality control issues can be suspect. Saying there is quality control of products and actually having quality control are two different things.

Material components and the quality of them can vary and you're not going to know what they are. For example, there are over 50 different kinds of plasticizers, that's the ingredient that makes vinyl flexible. And it's inherently unstable, and when it migrates it can cause all kinds of physical changes in the product such as doming, puckering or shrinking.

Manufacturing processes have changed and a tweak in the operation, be it with the equipment operation or the chemistry, can have a deleterious effect on the final product that may not show up until sometime after the product is installed.

Price considerations, especially today, are going to impact the quality of the product. To keep manufacturing and transportation costs down means something must be cut. That something is often cheapening the product. And when you cheapen the product that influences the quality and performance. And when one thing is changed it often has a domino effect on the quality.

The old products didn't shrink, cup, curl, dome, peel. They laid there forever without issue, and there are places where these products are still installed performing perfectly.

Sometimes we don't know what we have til it's gone – like the song. And sometimes what we have we don't understand. Just because the product looks the same as so many others doesn't mean it's the same. The difference is hiding in plain sight.

Not all vinyl flooring products are created the same though they may look the same on the surface. Looks can be deceiving.



Samples of Doming Vinyl Planks



Gapping Vinyl Planks



THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT

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Regional and Application-Specific Standards End-use applications in healthcare, education, or commercial buildings may require additional specifications beyond general regulatory requirements. VOC emission standards and indoor air quality certifications can influence plasticizer selection for specific projects. Component formulations can vary in the product, and they can in batch to batch, depending on who's making them and how tight their quality control is. Also to consider is how much the components cost and who's shaving what to lower the price. Remember that every change in a flooring products components can change everything. Back to Newton's third law that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. And this has nothing to do with anything related to the installation of the flooring product or the environment or anything else. The issue may be related to just that specific products makeup, be it a one time issue or an inherent one that no one realizes can adversely affect the product.

Selecting the right components to manufacture flooring products requires balancing technical performance, regulatory requirements, processing compatibility, and supply chain reliability. All these factors can and will have an impact on how the flooring performs and how stable it is after it is installed. These decisions are a choice and are most often driven by cost. And of great importance is remembering and knowing no adhesive can counteract the movement or chemical change that occurs in a physically or chemically unstable flooring material. It's going to do what it's going to do on its own and nothing is going to stop it – no human intervention, especially installation, is going to change that.

Trends. Being that we are involved with hard and soft surface flooring products and issues on large commercial projects all over the country, we see trends in product failures. These could be carpet tile, vinyl tile and planks, sheet vinyl, concrete or any other flooring product. A trend is a repeating failure or problem with a product that when examined, analyzed and evaluated for cause, comes down to the product itself being the problem. As we've said repeatedly over the years, you can't

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just look at what you're seeing, you must look into it and investigate it to fully understand why the problem is occurring. You must understand the manufacturing process and what in the process can influence or cause the issue you're looking at. There is always an answer, and the product or circumstances can always be determined if you understand the circumstances. Remember, we're dealing with physics, chemistry, in some cases psychology and always with common sense and logic.

One thing you can bank on is that the process of installation cannot and will not create a physical change in the flooring material. Installation cannot cause a product to cup, curl, lift, dome, pucker, shrink or expand, fade, delaminate or exude plasticizer, whether the plasticizer is ortho phthalate or bio based. Other problems can certainly be caused by installation errors, but the things mentioned aren't among them.

So, the industry has been faced with claims and complaints in greater volume than ever before. Confidence and trust have been strained between manufacturers and flooring contractors as well as General Contractors and end users. And frustration has mounted exponentially. We hear it all the time and it's like a cry for help. If you read the flooring industry publications regularly, and you should, there have been articles written that quote manufacturers that mirror what we're telling you here. This isn't anything new.

The changes aren't over yet as the industry moves to pvc free products and bio based additives. And what problems and changes will create for the professional flooring contractor are yet to be determined. One thing for you to know is that we will stay ahead of the game with our contacts and influences in the industry. When you need answers or help you can count on us to have the answers, always.



Puckering Vinyl Planks

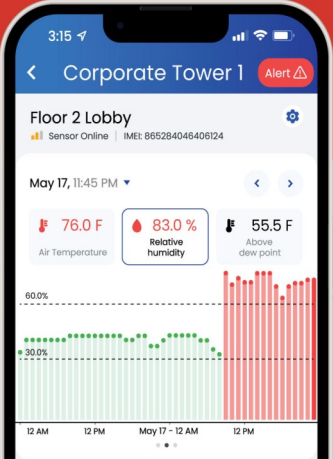
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