

CFR The Commercial Flooring Report

For the Commercial Floor Covering Industry

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WATERPROOF, WATER RESISTANT OR WHAT?

When reading most waterproof luxury vinyl products' installation instructions, concrete substrate moisture barrier requirements fluctuate. Some say it needs one, while others are not requiring one. Our industry needs help on this one. Here's a recent comment made by a marketing person of rigid core luxury vinyl flooring who says that while the rigid core flooring itself is waterproof, the installation methods, locking mechanism and floor prep will determine if the installed floor is waterproof or water resistant. What?! How does that work? It's a totally non-sensical statement. Just think about it. What are your thoughts? What does the installation, floor prep or locking mechanism have to do with the flooring material itself being waterproof or water resistant? The problem with statements like this is that the people making them have no technical knowledge about the products. No understanding about what the products are capable of or not, or how they will react. If the core of an SPC product has a finer or coarser grind of stone filler it will make a difference in whether it can resist water or not, and in how stable the product is. We've seen material tested in the lab that twisted like an airplane propeller. The speed at which these products are being made, changed and created is causing all of us to play catch up. And when you don't make the product and just source it, it's challenging to really understand all of its characteristics and idiosyncrasies.

SHEET POLYETHYLENE AS A MOISTURE BARRIER:

We are seeing that plastic film moisture barriers placed beneath the products can cause noises. In addition, the floating flooring is actually shifting, sliding over the barrier, with normal foot traffic. As one of our associates said, "My office's SPC, engineered LVP, shifts. It's a smaller size, custom 4' x 15' area under my desk. Out in the field, and in my office, the flooring shifts. The clear, plastic rolling chair protector also shifts, and can be a tripping hazard as well." Now a 6 mil poly sheet beneath a floating floor will trap moisture, which can instigate mold and mildew growth and, since moisture is a vapor, lift the poly which will lift the flooring. I'm not a big fan of any moisture membrane on top of a wet substrate. We've seen too many of them fail and create bigger problems and then the flooring contractor or installer gets blamed. This is like putting a band aid on a hemorrhage. They may work for a little while but the substrate always wins in the end.



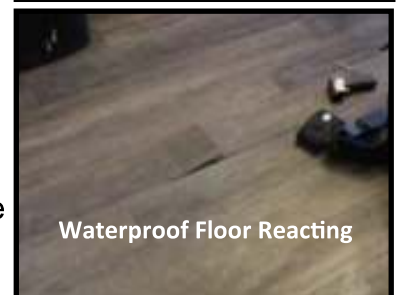
Waterproof



Water
Resistant



Moisture Membrane



Waterproof Floor Reacting

We were talking about the effects of moisture vapor from beneath these products at the lab the other day. There is no test for this and we discussed creating a test based on an ASTM protocol, without it being a certified test but just to see how the products react. We like to emulate real life situations in tests we create to see what the products will do and how they respond to what we're seeing in the field. Not all ASTM tests replicate real life conditions so sometimes you have to improvise.

This subject of waterproof or water resistant is a moving target. Not affected by water on top but affected by moisture and water from beneath, etc. Nobody knows anything about the product or the conditions under which it is installed. And reps are not technical people, and the technical people are forced to preach party line as sales and marketing will override logic and common sense and even the experience of the technical people who may know. They're making up the rules as they go along and no one wants to be left out, so if they say it, we have to as well. Most of the luxury vinyl tile and plank is made in China where quality control is sorely lacking at best. And the people selling the material are sourcing it and know little about it and that's everybody. We've said in the past that the demand for these products is so great that no domestic manufacturer can fulfill the need. This is also driven by the demand for the products and throngs of sellers wanting to jump on the bandwagon to cash in on this phenomenon.

As for inspectors looking at the claims on these products. We're seeing more and more of them in the field who don't have a clue what they're talking about, don't understand the product and how it's installed, or don't know what they're looking at. We have to unravel the knots they create when they make a comment that has nothing to do with reality. Especially today with the ever-changing products entering the market. The people teaching have never seen the product made, don't understand the chemistry and physics that influence it and are clueless about the characteristics, make up and origin of the products. Even the people selling the stuff are in a fog. Everything is an installation problem according to them all. Yet, most of what we see is product related and has nothing to do with installation. When you don't know, the easiest thing to do is blame the installer. Fortunately, being in Dalton we get the opportunity to visit manufacturing facilities and see the product being made, what it goes through and stay on top of the process and what can go wrong to create a problem in the field. Many of our associates are also from manufacturing and really know the products and their characteristics intimately. But with all of that it still goes back to selling the right product for the application. That doesn't mean a product that has no history in the market, that no one has ever heard of before, being sold by a company in some far region of the US that has nothing to do with manufacturing the product or quality control.



THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT
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The industry is now back pedaling on the waterproof issue saying that the products are water resistant and not water proof. It seems the sales and marketing people get caught up in the excitement of the buzz words and proceed to embellish the attributes of these products even when they don't possess them. A practice that has gone on for decades in the industry that I term, "ready, aim, shoot". Let's get it out there and we'll worry about it later. We also have a tendency to follow whoever is in the lead and making comments about products just so as not to be left out or behind. To this I had a talk with a manufacturer the other day concerned that the sales staff was one digit less in their moisture allowance than their competitors and they felt it put them at a disadvantage. The numbers mean virtually nothing because most people touting them have no science to back them up, have done no testing or research, since they have no technical people and it's just a tool to sell with. In addition, even with a number moisture is not static, it changes and fluctuates so even if a number is specified for the installation of a flooring material or component, the number is not etched in stone as the science will dictate what really happens. And remember what we always say, "words do not change the laws of physics, science or chemistry".

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We've seen tons of vinyl flooring curling, especially floating floors and it's being blamed on moisture in the substrate. If the flooring is supposed to be waterproof what difference does it make whether that water or moisture comes from the top, bottom or sides? You see demonstrations of these flooring types stuck in buckets of water or have water cascading on them and then you're going to use the excuse that because the moisture is coming from the substrate that it's distorting the flooring material? I think not, and it's

**See Page 5 Regarding Excess
Inventory Offer**



ridiculous to suggest it.

FLOATING FLOOR INSTALLATIONS:

Another issue is floating floors in commercial installations. Floating floors have no business being installed in a commercial environment. The biggest concern is the flooring material flexing and the tabs breaking which results in a flooring material and installation failure. You may think it's faster and easier to install but it's going to come back to bite you later. Especially if there's any rolling traffic. One of the ways we test these materials at the lab is to subject them to the ISO Castor chair test and we most often see them break apart. To add insult to injury there is no US industry standard or test for that matter for the strength of the tongue in the engagement system. There's a test for the strength of the entire connecting system but not for the tongue alone and it's most often that the tongue breaks.



What everyone has to keep in mind is to not oversell these products. You have to know what to use where and why and why not and keep yourself out of harm's way. And question materials on a project from a supplier you've never heard of that's probably somebody just sourcing the flooring. It's near impossible to determine the quality of some of this stuff by looking at it because there's so many products that look the same, even from the same manufacturer. And it's a bit overwhelming to an end user, architect or designer picking a product. They're going to believe whoever is selling the flooring to them. And be leery of the price, if it's too low the quality of the product is on the same level. Remember the old saying, "you get what you pay for". My advice to you is to buy from a manufacturer you know and trust, that you've got a relationship with and one that will work with you if there's a problem. Not to say you won't have one, but it's easier to resolve a complaint or concern from someone domestic than to try and get anything done by someone making a product and selling it to anyone and everyone from afar.

If you have questions, concerns or need help before a project or after you have a problem, contact us. We live, eat, sleep and breathe this stuff and we always have the answers.



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"WHEN NO ONE ELSE HAS ANSWERS, WE DO"