

Toxic flooring spurs lawsuits, company response

In this post, we examine how even flooring can spur lawsuits...

The quality of laminate flooring has definitely increased over the past decade with hardwood laminates becoming easier to install, more durable, and nicer looking. The variety of tones and textures is fairly broad, and the long warranties provided on many brands make them seem like a cost-effective alternative to carpet, solid wood, and vinyl.

Many apartment buildings and condominiums have hardwood laminate flooring in lobbies and other common areas or units. For those owners and managers, a recent "60 Minutes" report on problems with the product was not welcome news. The investigative story accused Lumber Liquidators of boosting profits by using cheaper, allegedly unsafe materials made in China. With video from some of the flooring factories and interviews with Chinese workers, "60 Minutes" made the case that the floor boards, which are manufactured through a compression process that involves glue, exceed California's emission standards for levels of formaldehyde, which has been linked to cancer in some studies on work-related exposure.

The company says it uses a three-tier testing method and complies with California's "applicable regulations." It also says it is confident its products are safe, and in support of that, the company is offering free indoor air-quality test kits for purchasers of Chinese-made laminate flooring. The company states they are the same quality kits used by the federal government to test workplace exposure to pollutants. If a test reveals high levels of formaldehyde, Lumber Liquidators will pay for further testing and possibly for the price of reinstalling flooring.

According to WebMD, breathing the fumes of formaldehyde can lead to irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, headaches and/or skin rashes. People with a sensitivity to the chemical could experience more serious reactions.

Lobbies and other common areas may not be as affected by formaldehyde emissions since there tends to be greater airflow in these portions of buildings. That could mean air-quality testing would show minimal contamination. But if you have installed the flooring in your units or enclosed spaces with limited ventilation, you might benefit from an air-quality test.

Although the "60 Minutes" report could be proven wrong in time, if you know you have Chinese laminate flooring from Lumber Liquidators installed testing the air quality is free and fairly easy. Once you've obtained the results, you can best decide how to proceed—whether that means further testing, a call to your lawyer, or giving the flooring the all-clear.

Protecting your residents and the value of your property are two great reasons to call Lumber Liquidators and get that test kit if you have installed Chinese laminate flooring from the company. Remember to document your test results so they are available if ever needed in the future. Good recordkeeping is good risk management!

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