



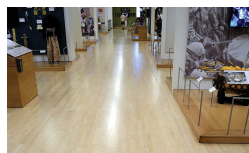
FLOOR COVERING

Installer

Understanding Air Quality in Resilient Floor Products



As younger generations start taking over purchasing decisions and baby boomers retire, the focus on health and well being is becoming more pronounced. Offering flooring and installation materials that contribute to better indoor air quality is becoming ever



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As Americans, we spend more than 90 percent of our time indoors, whether at school, the gym or in the office. Data shows that indoor air is 10 times more polluted than outdoor air. We strive to make the areas we spend the

most time in aesthetically pleasing; however, it is important to understand if the materials we are using are safe.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) noted recently that most Americans do not have a clear sense of the health risks of indoor air pollution. They also do not know what they can do to reduce the risk of asthma, cancer and other serious diseases caused by indoor pollutant exposure.

At the same time, people—regardless of their age—are more health-conscious than ever. Younger generations are willing to take initiative on behalf of their well-being and are prepared to pay a premium to achieve healthy goals, and baby boomers are focused on healthy aging with forward-looking goals of active retirement and independence.

With increased focus on overall health and well-being, and product information readily available at consumers' fingertips, it is important to ensure building materials are healthy for the individuals utilizing the space.

Today's facility managers, owners and architects are prepared and proactive when it comes to purchasing products. They spend time researching online and comparing options before contacting a sales rep or ordering a product. They no longer want companies who are merely compliant with regulations; they want healthy and environmentally friendly products to be available for their workplaces, gyms and hospitals.

As manufacturers, suppliers, contractors, distributors and installers, we have a social responsibility to educate and provide quality materials. And when it comes to flooring, it is vital to recognize the importance of indoor air quality.

What is Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)?

The EPA defines Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) as the air quality within and around buildings and structures, especially as it relates to the health and comfort of building occupants. When it comes to indoor air pollutants in the flooring industry, the key concern is the potential emission level of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in materials and their adhesives. When VOCs reach critical levels, indoor air quality and health are compromised.

Consequences from indoor air pollutants can be experienced immediately after exposure or potentially years down the road. It has been said that the immediate effects of these pollutants can be similar to the common cold, which is why the EPA mentions the importance of paying attention to the time and location symptoms occur. Symptoms can include irritated eyes, nose and throat, along with headaches, dizziness and fatigue—which are typically short-term and treatable.

Long-term health issues can also occur after repeated periods of exposure. The EPA explains that these effects may include respiratory diseases, heart disease and cancer; however, further research is needed to better understand long-term exposure.

Indications of indoor pollutant exposure have also been referred to as “sick building syndrome.” Sick building syndrome is used to describe a situation in which the occupants of a building experience weakened health or discomfort that seem to be directly linked to the time spent in a particular space.

The good news is that people value healthy products and are willing to pay more for them. The Consumer Goods Forum’s 2017 Health and Wellness report outlined interesting findings on homeowners’ willingness to pay premiums for healthier homes:

- 60% of homeowners surveyed would pay more for a healthier home than a traditional home
- 70% of homeowners surveyed consider a building products’ health impact equally or more important than factors such as comfort, performance, cost, aesthetics and durability

With research such as this pointing toward increased motivation by homeowners to pay more for healthy materials in their homes, it makes sense why they would also care about the use of healthy materials in spaces they spend the majority of their time in, such as work and school.

Ensuring that materials are safe

Anyone can say their materials are safe to use. We hear about “greenwashing” (making eco-friendly claims that are too good to be true) more frequently than we would like. To ensure you are purchasing materials that have credible and accurate claims, it is suggested that dealers and purchasers of flooring materials look for third-party certifications and reports.

With information on healthy building becoming more accessible, facility managers and owners may even ask for proof of certification. In fact, Action Floors has seen an uptick in requests for certification. In the flooring industry, there are a handful of third parties that can certify the safety of materials; however, not all certifications are equally recognized.

The Resilient Floor Covering Institute and SCS Global Services offer a FloorScore certification available for manufacturers of these materials. The program is one of the most recognized IAQ certifications for hard surface flooring materials, adhesives, and underlayments. Being FloorScore certified means that a

flooring product is independently certified by SCS to comply with the volatile organic compound emissions criteria of the California Sections 01350 Program.

The FloorScore program was established in response to the demand from end-users and architects to work with companies that produce healthy building materials with low VOC emissions. Ultimately, it provides architects and end-users assurance that indoor spaces are healthier and cleaner. It also qualifies for many green building programs including LEED v4, WELL, BREEAM, and CHPS.

The testing and certification process

Getting certified is no easy feat. Over an average of three months, a disciplined, eight-step process is followed to certify flooring products.

1. **Apply for certification.** Companies submit an application form. Once received, SCS prepares a proposal, which includes a detailed explanation of the process and more.
2. **Data collection.** SCS collects product data and determines whether a company can proceed based on the information.
3. **Onsite audit.** An SCS auditor conducts an onsite audit to observe the company's operation and interaction with technical staff. This thorough examination looks closely at all aspects of a business from handling of the raw materials to the manufacturing and quality control process, and the safety of the employees' work environment.
4. **Product testing.** The product is submitted to an SCS lab for testing. The sample is put in a chamber to measure the amount of VOCs emitted from the product.
5. **Corrective actions.** If non-conformities are found, the company must respond with a corrective actions plan.
6. **Reporting.** The auditor details findings, including data analysis, non-conformities and opportunities for improvement.
7. **Certification decision.** A technical review of the assessment is done, and a decision on the certification is made.
8. **Certification maintenance and renewal.** The company must undergo routine audits and continued product testing to ensure VOC levels are within range of the program. These tests are conducted annually or bi-annually based on a company's initial test results.

If you see a FloorScore seal, it means the product has gone through stringent testing to ensure the materials are safe. The standard retest can occur anywhere from one to three years depending on initial test results.

Across the nation, people live, work, heal and learn in indoor environments. People invest money in these spaces to reach goals of health, productivity, happiness and success. As manufacturers, suppliers, contractors, dealers and installers, we can strive to proactively practice healthy building. [Learn more](#)

about the importance of healthy building, and Action Floors' own journey to FloorScore certification, at actionfloors.com/sustainability/floorscore.

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