



C. Dean Thompson
President/CEO

Flooring Installation Crisis: *A Time for Action*

In August of 2015, I presented a hypothesis to the RFCI Board of Directors that a potential constraint to growth and consumer satisfaction in the flooring industry is a serious shortfall in the quantity and quality of installers. Since then, this subject, now referred to as the “installation crisis”, is echoing stronger than ever throughout the industry. The challenge, however, is that while there continues to be much industry chatter about the issue, there is also much hand-wringing about how to mitigate this problem. I do recognize that some organizations are working hard to train and develop installers but even so, we have yet to address this issue from a true strategic perspective.

As a member of the Floor Covering Leadership Council (FCLC), I repeatedly emphasized that the one issue common to all is installation, and since it continues to be identified as a top industry issue, there is no better topic to be united around than this one. After working through a day of strategic planning, FCLC leadership agreed that we must place this issue at the top of our list and have done so. But, putting it at the top of the list is only a start – we must take action.

Challenges to tackling any industry-wide issue are the many and wide variety of stakeholders, a wide variety of points of view, and yes, even many very strong opinions. It has long been my experience that any major issue is best served by first developing a common understanding of the problem, based on comprehensive facts and data generated through extensive and professional research.

Truth of the matter is, we know from some repeated research that installation is indeed a serious problem, but beyond that, little work has been done to strategically address this issue. Developing a common understanding is essential if we are to make progress. And, that understanding has to embrace the depth and scope of the issue, including its financial impact now and in the 5-10 years that lie ahead, as well as understanding potential solutions and barriers. Well-developed research is fundamental for drawing conclusions and making inferences based upon sound interpretation and analysis of data that will inform future decisions on this issue.

I’ve also learned over the years that we all are impacted by three domains of knowledge; the things we know we know, the things we know we don’t know and most importantly, the things we don’t know we don’t know. I really believe that significant progress will be made on this

issue when we are open to realizing there is a lot we don't know we don't know about this issue.

As the FCLC leadership team recently reported, a research initiative is now underway through The Blackstone Group, a highly-recommended Chicago based firm. During the 2017 October RFCI Board of Directors meeting, I again reviewed this topic. I agreed manufacturers do not play a direct role in the recruiting, training, and retention of installers, but since installation does significantly impact their businesses, I emphasized that having a vested interest to ensure that this issue is being strategically addressed is indeed important. The RFCI Board of Directors agreed with the FCLC proposal and committed funding for the research.

My hope is that others will follow and agree to a funding sponsorship level when asked to do so. FCLC members are currently in full swing with the fund raising. Funding is being coordinated by Phil Zolan at WFCA who can be contacted at pzolan@wfca.org or call 229-220-4974.

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Dean was selected as President & CEO of the Resilient Floor Covering Institute (RFCI) in 2007, the position he presently holds. His career spans nearly 50 years in the floor covering industry including four years at Armstrong World Industries, thirty-four years in various executive roles at Milliken & Company, two years as a Principal of the Hatteras Group, a management consulting firm, and 10 years in his current position.





RFCI is a nonprofit industry trade association that represents the major manufacturers of resilient flooring marketed throughout North America. RFCI administers FloorScore®, a voluntary, independent certification program developed by Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) to test and certify hard surface flooring and associated products for compliance with California Section 1350 indoor air emissions requirements. RFCI developed Industry-wide Environmental Product Declarations and the ANSI/NSF 332 Sustainability Assessment Standard for Resilient Floor Coverings, a standard that provides verifiable information about the environmental and social aspects of resilient flooring. RFCI serves as a clearinghouse for information on the resilient floor covering industry and helps educate specifiers, end-users and consumers about resilient flooring.