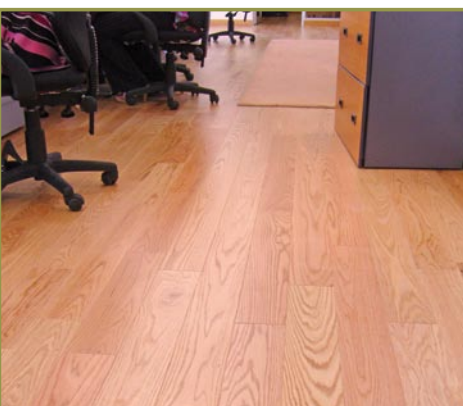
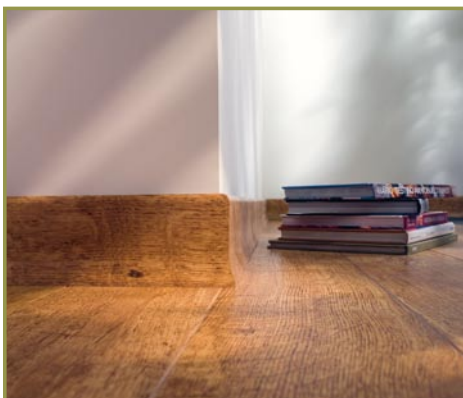


Understanding laminate and solid wood flooring



The flooring industry uses technical terminology that is sometimes confusing for the layman. SAWLFA (the Southern African Wood & Laminate Flooring Association) thought it would be valuable to try to make the process of buying flooring simpler.

Installing wood or laminate flooring in your home can be a risky business, particularly if you choose the wrong supplier or quality.

Not all floors are of the same quality

– even though they may look alike!! For this reason laminate floors are graded into various classes to indicate their resistance to wear in either a home or commercial environment.

There are well over a hundred different brands of flooring on offer in South Africa. Many of these products are of excellent quality and will last for many years.

However, there are a disturbing number of instances where products do not meet the advertised performance levels, causing serious problems for the consumer.

Unscrupulous importers inflate their product capabilities. Rogue flooring sales people and installers give verbal guarantees that are seldom honoured and even default with customers' deposits.

The Southern African Wood and Laminate Flooring Association was formed in 1998 in an attempt to safeguard the interests of the consumer. It does this in three ways:

1. All applicants are screened before being admitted. Members are required to meet minimum set performance levels and to adhere to a code of ethical conduct.
2. Importer members are required to provide the Association with detailed product specifications verifying their quality claims. Test results from a bona fide authority such as the South African Bureau of Standards or a European testing facility such as the EPLF (European Producers of Laminate Flooring) are compulsory.
3. Installers are encouraged to undergo a SAWLFA competency test to verify their ability. (To check if a member is

accredited, ask the installer for his badge which should display his full name, photograph and the SAWLFA logo).

SAWLFA Chairman Peter Geyer says that people should be wary of buying the lowest priced product. Your bargain may turn out to be very expensive in the long run!

There are five different grades or Abrasion Classes (AC1 to 5). AC1 is the softest or least wear-resistant, and AC5 is the hardest and most durable. One should always enquire about the grade or class of laminate flooring before placing an order.

Generally, Grades 1 & 2 should be confined to areas of very low traffic such as bedrooms. Grades 3 & 4 are suitable for use anywhere in the home, and Grade 5 is mainly used in high-traffic situations such as restaurants and busy shops.

Wood and laminate flooring products may also vary in their resistance to swelling and fading, their density and joint strength. Reputable suppliers will offer full disclosure on all these product features, in writing.

Most problems with flooring products occur as a result of poor installation. It is worth paying a little more to have your flooring installed by a trained team. SAWLFA, in conjunction with the South African Bureau of Standards, has published standards which deal with the general principles of installing solid wood as well as laminate floors. These guidelines are available to the public and should be strictly adhered to by installers.

Apart from providing consumers with access to accredited members, SAWLFA also offers a consultancy service to assist in disputes that may arise. For a small fee, SAWLFA will conduct a thorough technical evaluation of the problem and provide an unbiased opinion. Members are expected to abide by its findings.

You can verify membership through contact with the association provided on the website www.sawlfa.co.za or by contacting Sandra, the full-time secretariat of the Association by telephone 011 455 2822 or by e-mail at sawlfa@mwebbiz.co.za.