

The article below came out recently on LinkedIn. It was written from a long time well established floor inspector. I do not want to name any names so those were redacted. There are a number of long term established flooring inspectors could write something similar based on their experiences. The flooring inspection industry **used** to be an honorable profession. Over time, manufacturers have found ways to get involved financially with some schools or trade associations. With ownership changes, some schools have become conflicted to what their mission or core principals are. Rather than training **high quality independent** flooring inspectors, some became **diploma mills** doing the bidding of manufacturers to protect **THEIR** financial interests Rather than training forensic floor specialists, training for one school in particular has become training manufacturer **hired guns**.

When I started more than twenty five years ago, there were fewer than 600 inspectors in North America. In North and South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, Virginia, Georgia and Pennsylvania (states I used to service on a regular basis), I could usually count on one hand how many **FULL** time inspectors there were and at least have a thumb left over in those states. Because of new schools being started and ownership changes of one of the oldest and most established schools, there are well more than one thousand inspectors, many with less than five years experience. When I lived near Winston Salem and serviced the greater Charlotte area (within one hour radius), there were maybe three. Most newly trained inspectors are lied to in order to get them to pay thousands of dollars to get certified, only to find there is not nearly as much work available as they were led to believe.

Today, because of school ownership changes and new owner handing out certifications like candy, there are nearing twenty inspectors **JUST** within a one hour radius of Charlotte. I used to be able to count on one hand how many **FULL** time inspectors there were in states I serviced. When the school was sold about a decade ago and new ownership was influenced by manufacturers who financially supported the school, offered free instructors, plant mills and other financial support, this changed. I do not have enough fingers and toes to count how many inspectors there are today. Most are still not full time which is what manufacturers wanted.

With more inspectors than there is work for allows them to do what they did to installers and squash their fees down. And if an inspector calls too many (in the words of one of their own claims managers said in a public forum in front of more than 100 inspectors), they will get warned. If it does not change, they will stop using their services. I used to cover multiple states and build routes where I could charge lower rates and make a good living splitting the travel costs over as many as thirty inspections.

Inspection reports were easier to write. Manufacturers only really wanted to know one thing: is it our fault or not? If it is not, the less said the better. They did not want to report what the cause really was as it could financially hurt dealers or distributors who are their customer. With inconclusive reports, it allowed the retailers and distributors to push the cost of another inspection on homeowners or installers who may not have the means or want to spend the money to get an answer. Inspectors did not have to lie, withhold facts, or report incorrect information. They just had to inspect the concerns the claim was filed for and show it was not due to manufacturing issues. This left the retailer, distributor, installer or homeowner with a problem and no definitive answer to the cause.

The first inspector training school I was certified through more than 25 years ago was founded by a man who spent decades in the heart of the flooring capital (Dalton, GA). Sadly, this great teacher and mentor who was respected by many passed away nearing two decades ago. A long time friend and mentor of mine used to teach for the founder when he had health or other issues. He tried to purchase the school, but they could not come to agreeable terms so he started his own inspector training school. He also brought on two other highly respected inspectors to assist in training w inspectors and continuing education for established inspectors. Being a friend and colleague of all three, they have a highly respected training school. They do everything they can to ensure any inspectors who take their training remain independent, unbiased, and know how to do a proper inspection and write a well cited cohesive inspection report.

The founder's widow hired another inspector who had years in retail and installation to take over teaching. He spent at least five years there, updated all training materials and tests> He also tried to purchase the school from her, but never came to terms both parties could agree to. He since started his own inspection school and brought on another highly trained inspector to teach advanced tile classes. I know both of them; they are long time friends, colleagues, and mentors and both are highly respected in the industry.

Sadly, the original school was purchased by former manufacturer employees. With ownership and management changes, this school started losing respect of long time established inspectors. Many have stopped supporting this school and allowed their membership on the school's website to lapse. Training under new owners morphed into using technical people from manufacturers to train inspectors.

Rather than learning the truth and understanding where, how, and why things happen, inspectors are now being trained **to protect financial interests** of manufacturers. The owner recently sold the school to a long time friend who operates a trade association representing manufacturers. Basically, a lobby group to fight for manufacturers. He has since purchased this and one other long time established inspection school. If this is not a direct conflict of interest, then I am not sure what is. Now we are allowing the foxes to guard the hen house and the eggs.

This article was written by an inspector with more than thirty years in the industry. He introduced wood science classes taught by well respected PhD wood scientists from large well respected universities. The professors taught the unvarnished proven peer reviewed science for wood flooring; it was met with protest by manufacturers. Once the truth was taught and inspectors understood wood flooring from seed to finished product, manufacturers fought this tooth and nail. **The proverbial cork was let out of the bottle.**

Using their **deep pockets**, manufacturers tried coercing this inspector education group, training schools, and the trade associations. Threats were made to the instructors, inspectors taking these classes, trade associations, and training schools trying to stop this. The **self appointed flooring gods of Dalton** tried to threaten inspectors who did not **bow down to their corporate idols**. Sadly, the first and longest established inspector training school under new ownership allowed manufacturers and their financial support change how inspectors were trained. This was to ensure inspectors did not know the real truth. Inspectors could be taught just what they wanted to coerce them to side with the manufacturer most of the time. Even if it meant using unrelated facts to blame an installer, homeowner or retailer for the manufacturer's problem, this is how newer inspectors were being trained.

One colleague was one of the last instructors for this school. He was NOT associated with manufacturers. He had to bury an adult son a few years ago. Between this, his age, and the impact it took on his family with him traveling as much as he did, decided to step down as lead instructor. Rather than being empathetic to him and celebrating his decision, the owner of the school became vindictive. Calls were made to manufacturers slandering him. The school owner told outright lies about him saying he was **no longer** certified and not to use his services. How is that for a thank you for your service for years being an instructor and inconveniencing your personal and family life trying to teach new inspectors.

The same **self appointed flooring gods of Dalton** heard similar lies and slander of long time established well trained inspectors who decided to cut ties with this school (for VERY good cause). Threats were made, lies were told, and one of the larger self appointed flooring gods started telling inspectors they would no longer use their services or accept any reports if they conflicted with those of the inspector they sent out. It did not matter if **their** inspector totally made an incorrect call or wrote a report blaming anything BUT them, often with NO evidence so they could deny a valid claim. They decided breaking federal antitrust and other federal or state laws would be the way to silence anyone who offered 2<sup>nd</sup> opinion inspections to refute their inspector's findings.

Let's face it; retailers and homeowners are **a dime a dozen**, aka expendable-replaceable. Installers work VERY hard to feed their families rarely have the financial means to fight corporations. Making them the fall person was easy or blaming the homeowner or other unfounded cause. If you know anything about installers, they work long hours at pay that is below where it should be, often because major corporations can squeeze them to work for

less in order to get work. Ask most any installer how many times they can handle replacing several thousands of dollars of floor and stay in business. Cost of retaining legal counsel to fight them can easily destroy their business.

*This article came out recently. I know the author, manufacturer and inspector he referenced . Both are long time, well established inspectors. The author took a stand bringing these classes to the industry to educate inspectors. This cost him personally; he has been attacked by manufacturers (losing work) and associations who did NOT want this information taught. It is easier to hide proprietary trade information. Wood science is not; it is on record by the USDA. They own the largest wood lab in the world with leading wood scientists at their disposal. They are not so easy to silence. Wood scientists at leading universities also pose a threat when they teach things that go against the faulty information propagated by flooring manufacturers or training schools who bow to them.*

*Give it time; the self appointed flooring gods of Dalton may find a way to threaten the universities using their deep pockets to silence these professors. For now, the truth is still being taught and inspectors who stopped bowing to the flooring gods of Dalton. Honest and ethical inspectors are not afraid to write factual, well cited reports, even if it blames the manufacturer rightfully. Because manufacturers have issues with their products they used to be able to lie about or hide, the truth is posing a threat when it is taught. Take some time to read what actually transpired in the inspection industry more recently. This includes threatening to NOT pay for inspections they commissioned UNLESS the inspector would change his report to suit them. You just can't make this stuff up.*

## **Dalton Mill Inspectors**

*"It ain't what they call you, it's what you answer to." – W. C. Fields*

*Do you think there is a Floor Inspector Problem? If the answer is yes, look to Dalton, GA, and the "Dalton Mill Inspectors", for the cause.*

*Disclaimer: The term "Dalton Inspector" refers not to any school or organization, but to the submissive attitude of some inspectors willing to sell their integrity for a low mill fee. .*

*Each week, commentaries by retailers, installers and contractors appear on social media forums complaining about manufacturers hiring Dalton Mill Inspectors who write whatever the mills require to deny legitimate manufacturing defects.*

*Certification has become a business, and too many inspectors rely on the paper cert rather than education and experience. An entire industry has grown up without any oversight. Currently, ITS, IFCII, ICRII and CFIU meet every two to three months to discuss oversight parameters to further the trade beyond the one-week wonders.*

**INSPECTORS ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE DEFACTO MILL EMPLOYEES!**

*The Guild supports two schools that recommend education beyond a one-week course: IFCII and ITS. Why? They support our efforts for advance scientific education.*

*This story is from one of our Peer Reviewed Inspectors. It should be horrifying to read by flooring professionals.*

After eight years with no contact, a manufacturer requested an inspection from a Peer Reviewed Inspector. He informed them he would not use their third-party payment or reporting system. They insisted, and he accepted if they agreed to his conditions. They agreed, said, go do the inspection.

The inspector's findings were clear. No installation issues. There was visible topical damage. There were manufacturing defects. And absolutely no moisture concerns. The analyst had questions by email, they were answered, and the inspector reiterated his findings for the analyst.

The retailer, after receiving a copy of the report, contacted the inspector to confirm if the report they received was his because they had questions. After confirming the report was his, the retailer sent him a copy of the Denial Letter.

**The Denial Letter stated the inspector had written in his report there were moisture issues. This misinformation used the inspector's name and name of his service.**

This was a complete falsification of facts and a direct assault on the inspector's reputation. The inspector did not know that was done until after the retailer contacted him! Fraud? Mislead with intent to defraud? Defame the inspector's good name and reputation?

To use someone like that, with complete disrespect, seems to be only allowed or accepted in the floor inspection trade.

The retailer questioned when 7.5%–8.5% moisture content became “excessively high.” Meter photographs were in the report. The retailer was told it is not excessively high by the inspector. There was additional visual and measured data that confirmed there had not been any moisture issues in the past.

The retailer requested a meeting with the district, regional and sales rep managers who informed the retailer the report should have been “vetted and corrected”—Read that again because “Vetted and Corrected” means, change the report to meet their desired criteria to deny the claim?

The claims department then requested a conference call with the inspector. This was three weeks after the report with no payment issued.

The inspector stated clearly: if the goal was to pressure him into changing a factually correct report, they would need to pay for his time, but he would not revise the findings. He also reminded them that they had already used his report despite not paying for it and made false statements about the contents of his report. No respect.

An inspection report is the property of the inspector until payment is made.

Next came the email: ‘Your invoice is on hold until your report is corrected.’ In other words, be dishonest. Write a lie or no payment. He refused.

The inspector withdrew his report and invoice. Peer Reviewed inspectors' integrity is not for sale. That is one of the biggest factors for the Guild's Peer Reviewed Inspectors. The claims manager replied by threatening that any future inspection the inspector performed on their products—for installers, retailers, or homeowners—would be automatically rejected.

INTIMIDATION?

Can we infer from that, that honest factual reports are to be rejected without review? Or any reports by honest inspectors rejected? If the inspector refuses to be intimidated? If the inspector can be controlled? Ruin his reputation and career?

**Please, never again pretend for the public that Dalton Mill Inspectors are not bias.**

*This became a marketing opportunity. The inspector retained all emails and the denial letter that misrepresented his report and the attempt to coerce him into changing the truthful report.*

*This behavior is disrespectful to inspectors and shows how dependent they believe inspectors are on their mill fees.*

*This behavior shows the fault may start with the Dalton Mill Inspectors, and the floor manufacturers who use them, Vs. Independent Floor Inspectors.*

*The inspector is creating a brochure for retailers, lawyers, and consumers showing what they are up against in the Claim Monster Industry. He will be advising them that litigation is often the only recourse. He has been qualified as an expert witness in several states.*

***In court, the judge will decide if the report will be accepted based upon its merits, and expertise of the inspector. Not the mill manager with his “special interest”.***

*This type of activity by this claim's office demonstrates that all claims to honest, un-bias third party inspectors, is gone by some manufacturers.*

*Are Dalton Mill Inspectors expected to alter reports and lie for the mills?*

*Not every manufacturer behaves this way, but the practice is widespread enough to damage trust in the entire inspection system. Inspectors who allow themselves to be bullied or write bogus reports for continued work do not deserve respect. They are not independent flooring inspectors; they are a chattel of the mills.*

*If there are any schools that favor this type of dishonesty, and encourages their inspectors to follow this practice, they should have their inspectors rejected for claims by retailers, installers, contractors and homeowners.*

*We urge all consumers, installers, and retailers to take control of their claims, hire their own independent inspector, and be certain that he or she is not a Dalton Mill Inspector.*

*How is that for what was a once respected career. Now, there are still some honest, unbiased, ethical, and respected inspectors out there. Most of them have more than fifteen years in the industry and some with more than twenty to thirty years. They saw the changes and decided to become consultants. I have more than three dozen inspection certifications. For each floor covering, I may have five or six different certifications including advanced certifications. Like my high school diploma or two college degrees, there is no expiration date on any of them. They were earned by taking the extensive training and passing extensive exams. Unlike a professional license which only government or approved oversight agencies can grant, they are NOT required to be renewed. Most inspectors will not stop learning; the industry and products are constantly changing and one will continue taking ongoing training to stay on top of industry or product changes.*

*I have been retained as an expert witness dozens of times in at least four states and Washington DC. NOT once was I asked if my certifications were expired. As a matter of fact, I have been in trials where experts for other parties were not even certified flooring inspectors. Some were home inspectors with years of training in wood working or building trades. Some were long time installers. Some worked in retail and had installation and other training and NO certification. After being questioned by attorneys for both sides, the court (aka judge) had final say as to who was qualified and who was not. I witnessed with a professor from NC State who was head of the wood science department watch a home inspector with two decades of cabinet making sworn in and his report introduced as evidence. We heard the judge state he read a report of another expert who had years of inspection training including being a National Wood Floor Association certified inspector have his report disqualified by the judge for lack of foundation. NWFA is one of the most respected and highly sought certifications.*

*So if a **self appointed flooring god** Dalton manufacturer tries to tell you they do not accept inspection reports from a certified inspector with years of experience, ignore them. They do not legally get to dictate who can inspect their floors any more than you can dictate who they retain to do an inspection. There are antitrust and consumer protection laws and agencies in place. One call to an attorney providing them with any reports, pictures and other evidence for review is a start. One letter from an attorney to the legal department of a **self appointed flooring god** from Dalton or anywhere else may change their tune. Filing a claim with state or federal attorney general offices or oversight agencies will not fare well and they know it. Sometimes a bully has to be stood up to. They depend on using fear motivation to scare others. But when someone stands up to them and they know they will not back down, bullies usually end up backing down. **DO NOT** let a manufacturer, retailer, or other involved party try to lie or bully you. If it has to go to court, a judge may not be so forgiving. A judge has the power to sanction them (financial penalty) or require them to reimburse you for attorney and other fees. Facts should speak for themselves and lies or manipulation tactics can be exposed. In the end, the truth should prevail.*