



## Don't Hate the Umpire: Understanding the Role of Warranties

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While assisting a wood flooring claim for a customer recently, I couldn't help but notice the similarities between a manufacturer's warranty and the play-calls made by an umpire or referee, whether the calls are *popular or not*. Traditionally in the world of professional sports, rules have been clearly defined and umpires are in place to ensure that the rules of the game are followed. In this way, the fair interest of both teams is mediated.

Likewise, customers and wood flooring manufacturers have their own umpires in place. You know it as *the product warranty*. This umpire clearly delineates the "rules" of product application and care, as well as to ensure that both buyer and seller are duly protected. In simple terms, a warranty is a written promise or agreement made by the manufacturer or seller of a product that guarantees some aspect of the product.

Warranties provide clear descriptions of what is covered and what is not; how a specific product must be installed and maintained; its terms, duration and who are eligible; what steps the owner should take if there is a complaint; what the manufacturer will or will not do, as well as any remediation strategies associate with defects, damages, repairs and so on. In most cases a manufacturer's warranty is only applicable to what it can control or have direct oversight over, such as product quality, not installation or service matters.

Just like the work of an umpire, warranties are consulted to differentiate between a frivolous, unfounded product complaint and justified quality issues. During dispute resolutions all eyes are focused on the umpire or warranty. Questions arise. What went wrong? Is an inspection needed to gather more data? Are complaints arising from unrealistic customer or product expectations? Were moisture issues involved? Was incorrect maintenance involved? Were the installation instructions actually followed?

It's vital for the end-user to read, understand and ask questions about their warranty, because also framed in this document are the limits of use and details guiding complaint resolutions. After a failed installation, which is *usually related to jobsite conditions or the installation and unrelated to the manufacturer*, some may assert that manufacturers are really disingenuous, not standing behind their products or have warranties in place with ambiguous phrasing meant to dissuade or confuse the customer. However, that's simply not the case.

The facts are manufacturers invest real dollars to maintain a positive customer experience as well as foster repeat business. Manufacturers absolutely want their products installed correctly and to that end will provide customers with an abundance of helpful information including installation and floor-care instructions. And yes, the *manufacturer's umpire*: The *written warranty*. So don't hate the product warranty; it's merely doing its job.