**Staying on the fast track of innovation**

**MMFA focuses on quality criteria for modular multilayer flooring**

**With modular multilayer flooring (MMF) currently booming and new types of product construction being launched all the time, the international flooring landscape has seen a significant change within a short space of time. Whilst sales figures are climbing, the wealth of products makes the market increasingly complex, necessitating more technical expertise when it comes to marketing. In its role as a European association, the MMFA wants to actively shape future developments and so is focusing on its own research projects and involvement with ongoing standardisation work.**

**Carl Ruland, Convenor of the MMFA Market Development Committee**, explained: “Sales figures for MMFA members continued to rise in 2018, and in 2019 we forecast continuing sales growth for all product categories and markets within the MMF segment. For MMF flooring with HDF core, the Association currently estimates that its members hold a world market share in excess of 90%. By 2017, MMFA producers had already achieved global sales in this category of almost 10 million m2, of which 80% were accounted for by Germany, Austria and Switzerland. In 2018, the total quantity rose even further to 12 million m2.

For modular multilayer products based on polymer or polymer composite, MMFA members worldwide achieved sales of 62 million m2 in 2018 (2017 comparison: over 48 million m2), of which more than 31 million m2 (prev. year: 23 million m2) came from Western Europe and around 26 million m2 (prev. year: 21 million m2) from North America. In 2018, MMFA members in Germany achieved sales of wood-based *and* polymer-based products amounting to nearly 20 million m2 (prev. year just under 15 million m2) – continuing the upward trend.

“The success of MMF flooring has attracted many new suppliers to the market, leading to a significant increase in the range of products on offer,” explained **MMFA President Matthias Windmöller**. “Naturally, this is why we always need to keep a close eye on the subject of quality control and product characteristics. One of the aims of our Association is to achieve transparency, which is absolutely essential to ensure that customers are not disappointed and to be able to fully exploit potential.” It means that the communication between industry and commerce and the fast pace of innovation must keep up with each other.

A further aim of the MMFA is to impose reliable product quality. To achieve this, international standards should be adapted to product developments as quickly as possible. Some mixed products are currently not covered by clear evaluations or standards. To address this, MMFA members made the decision in spring 2018 to once again raise the Association’s research budget. The MMFA undertakes in-depth fundamental research so it can play a role in developing the content of international standards. At the top of the to-do list is the key task of defining meaningful product clusters and appropriate evaluation criteria for the various types of multilayer floors. This will lead to a better understanding of the products and their application for all concerned.

**MMF products groups now in categories Wood – Polymer – Mixed**

At their autumn meeting held in Cologne in November 2018, members of the MMFA agreed to reclassify the various MMF product groups. In this regard, the Association also made a clear commitment to bring together the variety of products in this class under the generic term “MMF”. **Sebastian Wendel, Convenor of the MMFA Technical Committee**, gave a summary of the outcome: “We are retaining our existing classification system for MMF products, but we wanted to move away from the concept of Classes 1, 2 and 3.” So from now on we will categorise according to the construction of the MMF – namely wood, polymer or mixed.

The category “Wood” (previously Class 1) applies to products with a wood-based core. The category “Polymer” (previously Class 2) includes polymer-based and polymer composite-based substrates and is divided into heterogeneous, (semi-) resilient **LVT Click products** (mostly in accordance with EN 10582, previously Class 2A) and the more stable **Rigid products** (usually in accordance with EN 16511, previously Class 2B). “Rigid” includes polymer Click products based on either **EPC** (Expanded Polymer Core – polymer foam middle layer) or **SPC** (Solid Polymer Core – high-filled middle layer). Lastly, the category “Mixed” includes all other types of construction (previously Class 3). In all three categories, the polymers can be either PVC or other synthetic material alternatives. This classification system continues to form the basis of the sales statistics which are made up of quarterly sales figures reported by ordinary MMFA members (producers).

**New WG 11 in the CEN and MMFA research**

In 2018, the MMFA reached some important intermediate goals in technology and standardisation. For example, it campaigned successfully in the CEN for the creation of the new WG 11 workgroup, which deals specifically with modular multilayer flooring.

“Dr Rico Emmler of the IHD Dresden, who was appointed Chairman of the WG 11, has a strong commitment to this role and is very competent,” said Sebastian Wendel. “This can only serve as a boost for European standardisation in our segment – and we hope that in future the new WG 11 also inspires the formation of a separate workgroup for MMF products at ISO level.”

The MMFA’s “Castor Chair Test” project will run until summer 2019 and involves the development of new test procedures and testing equipment. Extensive investigations are being undertaken for the long-term “Hot Spot” project, to examine heat stress at localised points on the upper surface of MMF flooring – e.g. from sunlight entering a room through floor-to-ceiling glazing. Temperature stress affects not only the surface but also the interlocking. The research aim is to develop new, practical test methods for floating MMF flooring, and because the entire flooring system has to be examined, different click systems plus a variety of underlay materials have to be taken into account.

**Products are becoming “greener”**

The MMF sector is investing heavily in the continuous improvement of MMF products in terms of application, installation and environmental performance. Bio-based products and those based on sustainable, renewable raw materials have very interesting potential, and much effort is being put into devising new formulations for flooring that is as low-emission and eco-friendly as is possible. Many brand manufacturers are already using alternative softeners or are dispensing completely with conventional PVC and in its place they are using polymers belonging to the group of polyolefins. Others, on the other hand, are focusing on rigid products with a mineral core. This is where the current dynamics of the market are very exciting, due to the use of innovative and ecological approaches and materials. The MMFA views this as a positive trend, as Mr. Windmöller commented: “We are delighted to see sustainable concepts being put into practice in our business sector. This is another area where our members can count themselves amongst the pioneers.”

**Joining in 2019: new members Tarkett and Neodecortech**

2018/2019 is a time of renewed growth for the MMFA. As of January 2019, Tarkett France and the Italian decor paper printer Neodecortech will be joining the ranks of the MMFA network. This means that from 2019 onwards, MMFA statistics will be able to reflect an even broader market situation. The Association is currently made up of 23 ordinary members, 26 associate members and two supporting members. For the benefit of its main buyers markets, the MMFA is also expanding its language options online at www.mmfa.eu. Dating back to October 2018, all technical content has been accessible in French as well as German and English (including the MMFA Technical Bulletins which are available to download free of charge), and the plan is for Dutch to be added in 2019. This gives a wider range of international users direct access to the specialised information, thereby enhancing market transparency in the multilayer segment.

The MMFA is also collaborating with other industry associations – the ECRA, ERFMI and EPLF – working towards the establishment of the EuFCA (European Floor Covering Association), a new European umbrella organisation. This “Association of Associations” will be located in Brussels and its purpose will be to represent the interests of the industry in a universal, effective manner.

The MMFA will hold its next Annual General Meeting on 2 & 3 April 2019 in Augsburg and Buttenwiesen (Germany) at the invitation of associate member Surteco SE.

[www.mmfa.eu](http://www.mmfa.eu)

**Images**
**Image captions:**

**mfnd1901\_b1:**


Matthias Windmöller, President of the MMFA: “We need to keep a close eye on quality control and pricing trends. One of our Association aims is to achieve transparency. This is absolutely essential to ensure that customers are not disappointed and to fully exploit potential.” – Photo: MMFA

**mfnd1901\_b2:**

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Carl Ruland, member of the Executive Board since April 2018 and Convenor of the Market Development Committee: “Sales figures for MMFA members continued to rise in 2018, and in 2019 we anticipate renewed sales growth for all product categories in the MMF segment.” – Photo: MMFA

**mfnd1901\_b3:**


Sebastian Wendel, Vice President and Convenor of the MMFA Technical Committee since April 2018: “We are retaining our existing classification system for MMF products, but we wanted to move away from the concept of Classes 1, 2 and 3. So from now on we will be categorising according to the MMF construction – namely, wood, polymer or mixed.”
– Photo: MMFA

**mfnd1804\_b4:**

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This multilayer flooring was manufactured using epoxidised soybean oil as a bio-based plasticiser. – Photo: ter Hürne

**mfnd1804\_b5:**



MMF bio-flooring – warm and quiet underfoot, hard-wearing and easy to maintain. – Photo: HARO – Hamberger Flooring GmbH & Co. KG

**mfnd1804\_b6:**

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Sophisticated in design, hard-wearing and easy on your joints: This environmentally-friendly flooring is based on leather fibre material made from genuine recycled, chrome-free leather, natural latex, natural fat and natural tanning agents. – Photo: Li&Co AG

**mfnd1804\_b7:**



Wood and cork... totally natural. The combination of cork underlay, HDF core and cork upper layer makes this MMF flooring particularly resilient and quiet. – Photo: Wicanders/Amorim