

Winter Challenges for Hardwood Floors

The fall brings many challenges for hardwood floors which are often only remembered during the heat and humidity of the summer months. Furnaces have been running in many regions for several weeks. As cooler, outside air is heated for indoor use, its relative humidity level drops substantially. This in turn, affects several things related to hardwood floors; mainly finish application, maintenance, and wood shrinkage.

Lower humidity will shorten the working time of applying finish, so application procedures will need to be adjusted. Streamline your techniques in order to apply finish in less time. Restricting ventilation while applying finish will create more working time. Remember to ventilate well after the finish is applied!

One trick that can help in low humidity conditions is to add a little water to the finish – up to 12 oz. per gallon of finish. This will not extend the application time and it will help the finish flow and level quicker in fast drying conditions.

With cooler climates and drier air, dust migration also increases. Excessive dust makes floors slippery and can increase wear. Inclement weather radically increases tracked –in dirt, salt, sand, and grit so cleaning schedules should be increased to compensate. Frequent dust mopping and cleaning with Basic Coatings® Squeaky™ Cleaner is an excellent method to remove dust, dirt, and other build-ups. When moisture levels drop, wood shrinkage is an entirely natural process that opens up cracks between boards in wood floors. Unfortunately, opening cracks are most always noticeable and objectionable, in newly installed or freshly re-sanded floors.

Inadequate building materials and subfloors, insufficient nailing or gluing of flooring, little or no acclimation of flooring before installation or improper sealer/finish systems can all aggravate a shrinkage problem. The real and only cause of shrinkage is the loss of moisture in the wood and the only reliable way to prevent cracks from opening up is to maintain constant relative humidity year round. A simple investment in a humidifier can do wonders for maintaining a beautiful wood floor.