

Laminate Floor Maintenance
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Laminate flooring came on the market in Europe in the early 1980's and began to migrate to the U. S markets in the mid 1990's. Since that time laminate floor coverings have continued to grow in market share, with the number of manufacturers and importers increasing in number as well. In 2001 it is estimated that laminates have 4 to 5% of the U. S floor covering market and up to 10% of the market in some European countries.

According to the manufacturer's literature little or no maintenance is required other than regular sweeping or vacuuming, with an occasional moist mopping to remove spots, spills and tracked in soil. In fact, although most manufacturers sell a laminate floor cleaner, the major laminate manufacturers do not at this time sell or mention the need for or the availability of any appearance restoration process and in fact all advise against the application of a topical finish or coating.

Although aluminum oxide melamine coated resin surfaced floor coverings are low maintenance, they do scratch, scuff and dull with use over a period of time. The rate of deterioration depends on the level of daily maintenance provided (dry soil removal) and the amount of sand, grit and dirt tracked onto the surface.

Prevention

As with all floor coverings, prevention is directly related to long term appearance retention and the need for and frequency of restorative maintenance procedures. Walk of matting at all entrances and exits is recommended, along with daily or more frequent dust mopping or vacuuming (no beater bars, metal or power heads) to remove sand and grit that can and will scratch the surface of the floor covering. Chair and table leg protectors are required to prevent scratches and gouges to laminate flooring.

Moist not Wet Cleaning

WARNING: Laminate flooring is extremely sensitive to moisture and water. Under no circumstance should you wet or flood mop this type of floor covering as it can/will cause damage due to the flooring due to swelling of the backing or core material.

The recommended wet cleaning procedure is to mist or lightly spray clear water or a commercial laminate cleaner on to a Turkish towel or to use a slightly moist, well wrung out flat mop or micro-fiber cloth or a pre-moistened disposable flat mop cloth to clean the surface of the planks. Synthetic detergent, white vinegar or ammonia-based products may also be used. Do not use soap based cleaners, abrasive powders, steel wool, sandpaper or course synthetic scrubbing pads (black or green). It is my recommendation that when wet cleaning, move the mop length wise or parallel to the long side of the plank, and not across the short width of the planks as this will result in less moisture getting into the joints between the planks.

To reduce the possibility of moisture related damage or swelling, spot clean or mop only the visibly soiled areas of the floor rather than wet cleaning the entire surface. I would not use a sponge mop or commercial mop head to clean this type of floor covering, as moisture control is critical to prevent damage to the core or backing material.

Spot and Stain Removal

The Melamine surface is highly resistant to common spots and spills found in most homes, office and light commercial locations. If normal spotting with a synthetic detergent is not effective, apply degreaser or a citrus-based spotter to a cloth, apply to the surface and let dwell on the spot for 30 to 60 seconds and then agitate, using small circular motions, with the rag or an old tooth brush. If this is not effective test a small amount of a volatile solvent such as acetone; lacquer thinner, finger nail polish remover or alcohol. Agitate with a white (not black or green) synthetic scrubbing pad if necessary and wipe clean with clear water, then hand polish with a dry white Turkish towel. Use the same process on cigarette burns. As a last resort and for larger areas, you may try a vapor cleaner and a white towel. Vacuum joints to remove any moisture.

To remove gum, wax or adhesive, use a plastic putty knife, a white scrubbing pad and spot with a citrus degreaser or commercial adhesive remover. Then wipe with clear water and polish with dry Turkish towel.

WARNING: When spotting, be careful to avoid getting any chemical or moisture into the joints at the end or sides of the planks. Apply the spotting solution to a quarter sized area of a Turkish towel and spot with finger pressure. Do not liberally apply the chemical directly to the surface of the floor covering material.

Depending on depth and severity, scuffs and plastic burns may be removed or improved by polishing with a white pad and a citrus-based cleaner.

Scratches may be improved by applying a coat of finish to the scratch with a cotton swab. Clean first, let dry, then apply the finish.

Restoration Procedures

Laminate manufactures provide no recommendations or assistance when it comes to procedures for removing scuffs or scratches or restoring a uniform sheen or gloss to the surface.

However a number of secondary supply companies do offer products and procedures that can be used to apply a topical coating to laminate floors that have become scuffed, scratched or dull. It should be noted that these procedures should not be used on uneven or damaged floors. Be advised that these procedures at this time are not authorized or recommended by any laminate manufacturer and will void any applicable warranties that may be in place. Prior to beginning work, it is important that you advise the customer/consumer that these procedures are used as a last resort to improve the appearance of the floor instead of replace it. To protect yourself from liability have the customer sign a work order that authorizes you to perform these specific salvage procedures and holds you harmless from any claims or liability for possible damage to the floor.

These salvage/restoration procedures will not make an old damage floor look like new, however, depending on the condition of the floor, these procedures should considerably improve the appearance of the floor. If you have any questions as to whether, this process/product will work in a specific situation, do a small test area. When dry inspect carefully. To test for finish adhesion, once dry, tightly apply a test strip of masking tape from the old surface to the new coating and then remove it. If finish stays on the floor it should be ok.

Basic Restoration Procedures

1. Dust mop or vacuum the floor surface.
2. Clean the Edges. Begin in one room. Scrub around the edges of the room, four feet at a time, out approximately 10 inches, using a blue or maroon colored synthetic pad under a deck brush or pad holder. Prior to scrubbing, spray a light application of laminate cleaner or a synthetic detergent solution on the floor. After scrubbing four feet, immediately use a moist white Turkish towel to remove the soiled solution from the surface.
3. Clean the Center of the Floor. Once the edges are done in one room, clean the center of the floor in the one room, using the same procedure, but use a standard 175 rpm floor machine, working 4 X 4 ft. square areas. As each four-foot area is scrubbed, use a lightly moist clean cloth towel to remove any soiled solution that remains on the surface.
4. Repair any dings, chips or large excessively gapped joints. (use putty or heat sticks).
5. Once each room is complete, go over the entire room area again with a clean moist towel.
6. Proceed as outlined above until all rooms or the entire floor surface to be coated has been cleaned, repaired, then wipe with a clean moist towel.
7. Second wipe down. Use a clean moist towel to once again clean the entire floor surface. Wipe clean baseboards and door bottoms, etc as you proceed. From this point on in the process, cover shoes with protective slippers or work in clean stocking feet. No unprotected shoes should be allowed on the clean floor. Use walk off toweling at all entrances to work area. Limit the amount of traffic in the area and number of people entering the area. Cleanliness is critical or you will end up with visible contaminants in the topical coating.
8. Let floor dry for at 30 minutes to 1 hour; use air mover fans to speed the drying process.
9. Inspect the floor for cleanliness and re-clean/re-rinse areas that are visibly soiled and or streaked.
10. Apply Topical Coating. Apply a medium coat of laminate finish to the floor. Using a 12 to 14 inch lambs wool or similar applicator, begin by coating 12 inches around the perimeter of the room. Then apply the coating to the balance of the room, working 4 X 4-foot sections, overlapping each section by approximately 1 to 2 inches. Proceed around the room in this fashion until the entire area has been coated. Let dry 30 minutes to 1 hour and apply a second coat. Consumer should allow the floor dry at least 1 hour before walking on the surface. Secure the area and advise everyone to stay off the floor for at least 4 hours.
11. Clean up equipment and proceed to next assignment area.

Pricing and Production Rates

Pricing

Most areas the average rate for this type of work is \$1.50 to \$2.00 per square foot.

Production rates

With a two-person crew, you should be able to complete 400 sq. ft. per hour. One-person crew, approximately 300 sq. ft. per hour. Average home takes 3 to four hours. One person should be able to do two jobs per day. Two-person crew should be able to do three to four jobs per day.

Supply costs average 5 to 7 % of price of the job. Labor should not account for more than 50 % of your costs; the balance is profit 30 to 35% and overhead 10 to 15%. Most finishes cover approximately 500 sq. ft per coat.

Repairs

1. Scratches-Restore surface with application of topical coating to entire room or panel. Repair individual scratches with a cotton swab and feather in with a white pad.
2. Dings and gouges- Repair with putty, caulk or hot melt wax sticks. Apply spray lacquer to obtain match-surrounding area.
3. Scuffs- Attempt removal with acetone and a white pad. Polish out toothpaste, rinse and apply topical coating and feather in with a white pad.
4. Excess Gaps and Joint Space – Third party source caulk type products are available to fill in these spaces. Follow the manufacturer instructions closely.

Repair Product Sources

1. Coatings Development Group, Inc.
Sells Konig hot melt wax stick repair system
Has videos and wide variety of supplies and training
Ph-215-426-6216, www.cdgkonig.com
2. CalFlor Systems, See # 4 below.
Has caulk, putty sticks, adhesive remover and other products available.
5. Sinclair Equipment Co.
Has hot melt wax stick repair kit available
Ph-1-800-624-2408, www.sineqco.com
6. Contact Floor Covering Manufacturer
May have color matched supplies and systems available

Resources

1. Chemspec Inc. Rx for Wood Floors.
Ph-1-800-638-7370, www.chemspecworld.com
Have products, classes, video and instruction booklet.

2. Bridgepoint Systems. Wood Restoration Products.
Ph-1-800-715-2295, www.stores.bridgepoint.com
3. BonaX Wood and Laminate Products
Ph-1-800-574-4674, www.bonax.com
4. CalFlor Systems, Wood and Laminate Products
Ph-1-888-277-flor, www.caloak.com
Has finish, sealant and repair products

Other information sources

1. North American Laminate Flooring Association (NALFA)
Ph-202-785-9500, www.nalfa.com
2. European Producers of Laminate Flooring (EPLF)
www.eplf.de
2. Cleaning Consultant Services, Inc., Wm R. Griffin
Ph-206-682-9748, www.cleaningconsultants.com

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