

Wood Pro Inc.

The wood floor experts

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The truth about wood flooring warranties

Wood Pro Inc. prefers to set the performance expectations for wood flooring and flooring finishes in a realistic manner. In doing so, we believe a little truth goes a long way!

If you read most wood flooring manufacturer's warranties, you will find in big bold print, outlandish claims such as:

Lifetime Finish Warranty & Lifetime Structural Warranty- Some offer 40 year or 25 year warranties; some offer 15 year, some merely 10-year warranties. What does it all mean? Is one manufacturer's product really that much better than another's? Is one warranty better than another?

Before we address these issues and delve into what exactly hides in their warranty "fine print", **Wood pro Inc.** would like to look at two separate issues: The Properties of wood and wood floor finishes.

The Properties of Wood

All wood flooring is constructed of either solid wood, (just one piece in thickness), or engineered wood, (comprised of several layers of wood). As such, because wood is a living material, it reacts with water in much the same way your kitchen sponge does:

1. It can and will absorb water when exposed to water either in the form of liquid or also will draw in/give away water from humidity in the atmosphere and/or from the subfloor.
2. When it does absorb water, wood swells in size and may cup/crown.
3. When it dries out, wood shrinks in size and may also cup.

The only difference between engineered wood flooring and solid wood flooring is that engineered flooring, because it is bonded in alternating layers with the grain in each layer in an opposite direction, makes the wood somewhat more stable, (partially limiting how much the floor swells or shrinks). However, engineered wood flooring still shrinks or swells as it gains or loses moisture! And just like a sponge, wood flooring can crown or cup depending on how much moisture is gained or lost.

Each species of wood shrinks or swells at a lesser or greater rate unique to each species. This is a simple mathematic formula. For each gain of 1% of moisture content, a certain species of wood will gain X% in width. This formula simply represents the physical laws that apply to that individual species of wood and they are immutable.

So, the bottom line is, no manufacturer warrants wood flooring to be impervious to water! (More on this when we get to the "fine print" section).

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The Properties of wood floor finishes

All finishes, even with all the recent improvements to durability, will scratch and dent. If you drag something heavy across the floor you scratch the finish and perhaps even get under the finish itself and scratch/gouge the underlying wood, while you also may pull the overlying finish off.

All finishes will dent when pressed hard enough. Depending on the hardness or softness of the wood underneath the finish, the wood itself will dent to an even greater or lesser degree in direct proportion to the wood's hardness.

All finishes will wear from abrasion. If you allow sand and grit to lie on the floor, foot traffic will grind the finish down. Excessive foot traffic will also do the same over time. Initially the finish will dull in these areas. Eventually, the finish will wear down to bare wood if not recoated beforehand.

So the bottom line is, once again, no flooring manufacturer warrants their finish to be impervious to wear, much less abuse and all have a long list of what they consider abuse. (Once again, more on this when we get to the "Fine Print" section)

However, the good news is the ongoing finish revolution. In the past 5 years there have been vast technological improvements to flooring finishes with continued advances being made each day. Over the last 5 years, finish wear-ability has increased 5 fold and new formulas are coming on the market just now that increase durability 20 fold. This is the result of adding hard particles to the finish and from the use of new harder resins. While all this improvement brings finished flooring closer to "the holy grail" of total imperviousness, finishes still aren't there yet. Now to the Fine Print.

The Fine Print

Here is what typically is excluded in the fine print from the so-called "Lifetime Warranties" many manufacturers tout today.

On Wood:

- 1) Engineered Wood Flooring – "will not delaminate" – (Void if exposed to excessive moisture from below or above).
- 2) Engineered Wood Flooring – "will not move" – (Void if exposed to excessive moisture from below or above and if installed on a site that is has a relative humidity less than 30% or greater than 60%).

These figures are consistent with National Wood Floor Association guidelines. www.NWFA.org

On Finish:

- 1) "Will not peel or blister" – (Void if exposed to excessive moisture from below or above or exposed to chemicals, solvents, Alkaline or acids).
- 2) "Will not wear through to bare wood" – (residential use only & only if proper maintenance procedures are followed, meaning keep them clean and free from grit and, in addition, many manufacturers require recoating when showing first signs of wear).

The Warranty Killers

Here is what is included in the fine print as warranty “killers” by most manufacturers:

- 1) Soaking in water from above or below.
- 2) Wet mopping & failure to clean up spills.
- 3) Wet subfloor.
- 4) Relative humidity at site below 30% or above 50%. In accordance with National Wood Flooring Association standards.
- 5) Failure to protect the floors from sand or grit, pets, high heels, chairs or furniture with-out protectors, lack of mats at entry ways, excessive foot traffic, household chemicals, abrasive cleaners, etc.

Also, one should know most finish warranties don't consider a change in sheen or gloss level to be a defect – only peeling or complete wear through is.

In Conclusion

Is one manufacturer's warranty of “Lifetime” better than another at ten years?

The Lifetime Warranty is only slightly better. This is due to the fact that almost all causes for possible product failure (other than manufacturing process failures such as finish adhesion and glue bonds, which almost always appear within one year) are excluded in the fine print anyway.

And, as most reputable flooring manufacturers quickly take advantage of the new improvements to finishes and engineering as they become available from their suppliers, most similar flooring products are roughly equal in performance, regardless of warranty. You just have to be sure that the latest High Wear finishes are being used.

Wood Pro Inc.'s approach to warranties is to educate you to be realistic about product performance and our manufacturers' warranties and their limitations. The fine print is reserved only for legalese.

Wood Pro Inc. is also committed to providing products that use the latest technological advances in finish and engineering as they become available, always offering the finest flooring on the market.

Wood Pro Inc. wants to be up front and honest with you, the customer, so you do not have unrealistic expectations for your wood floor.

Your wood floor is a product of nature and we believe is the best choice when choosing a floor covering for your home. It is safe, healthy, natural and adds considerable value to your home. There are so many types of wood flooring to choose from. We appreciate that you have chosen to do business with Wood Pro. We take our job of educating the customer very seriously and believe in an honest approach, so that you come back and purchase again. We are committed to giving you great customer service and will handle all product complaints with this in mind. As a flooring distributor, we stand behind the manufacturers' warranties that we represent.