



NOFMA WOOD FLOOR CARE GUIDE

If it's not marked NOFMA, it's not certified.

Easy to come by. Easy to Keep

Wood floors, properly finished, are the easiest of all floor surfaces to keep clean and new looking unlike carpeted or resilient floors that show wear regardless of care. Wood floors can be kept looking like new, year after year, with minimum care. Since the overwhelming majority of wood floors are composed of solid hardwood, this care guide applies specifically to this type of flooring.

What is minimum care? A good rule of thumb is to vacuum and/or dust mop weekly. A **damp mop** can be used for spills, and when necessary general cleanup on floors which have non-waxed polyurethane or a similar surface finish. When traffic areas of surface finishes begin to show significant wear, screening and re-coating an entire floor is the least involved choice for maintenance. If a floor is waxed, occasional buffing helps renew the shine and remove scuff marks that may appear in the wax coating. If the shine cannot be renewed in heavily used lanes, occasionally re-waxing these areas may be necessary. Intervals for completely re-waxing a floor may extend to a year or longer when attention has been paid to proper care.

Wood and water don't mix. No matter what finish your wood floor has, NOFMA recommends never pour water onto the floor. While a **damp mop** may be used on polyurethane and other surface finishes in **good condition**, excessive amounts of water seep between the boards and into small scratches causing deterioration of finishes. Wax-coated finishes should **NEVER** be cleaned or maintained with water, not even a damp mop.

Read the label. The recommendation made here are not intended to endorse specific products or brands but to serve as general guidelines in the selection and use of floor maintenance materials. Always follow label directions for maintenance products, except for directions which call for using water on wood. And **always** use **only** products specifically designed for wood floors.

Preventative Maintenance

Preventative maintenance is a term more common to industry than to residential or office floor care, but its importance cannot be over-emphasized. Good preventative maintenance lengthens the intervals between the major renovation operations such as re-coating, re-waxing, and refinishing. Here are some basic rules that apply to all types of floor finishes.

- Keep grit off the floor. Use dirt-trapping, walk-off mats at all exterior doors to help prevent dirt, grit and sand from getting inside the building. Throw-rugs or small sections of carpet just inside the entrances are also recommended. Dirt and grit are any flooring's worst enemy and that includes carpets and vinyls as well as hardwoods. Keep door mats clean.
- In kitchens, use area rugs at high spill locations and at work stations-stove, sink, and refrigerator. Cotton is generally the best fabric since it is easily washed. Mats with a smooth backing, i.e. rubber or vinyl, may trap water beneath.
- Finishes and certain chemicals in wood oxidize and are affected by ultra violet light sources causing the wood and finish to change color and develop a patina or age. To avoid uneven appearance, move area rugs occasionally and drape or shade large windows.
- Put fabric glides on the legs of your furniture; they allow furniture to be moved easily without scuffing the floor. Clean the glides regularly since grit can become embedded in them. Some furniture may require barrel type roller casters as ball type casters may cause damage. Grey, non-marking rubber casters are the best. Avoid casters made of hard materials like metals or hard plastics.
- Vacuum regularly, as often as you vacuum carpets; a brush attachment works beautifully. Sweep or use a dust mop daily or as needed, but do not use a household dust treatment as this may cause your floor to become slick, dull finish, or interfere with re-coating.
- Wipe up food and other spills promptly with a dry cloth or paper towel. Use a slightly moistened cloth for sticky spills if necessary. Then wipe the floor dry with another cloth or paper towel.
- Keep heels on shoes in good repair, especially high heels. Heels worn away exposing the steel support rod will dent any floor surface, even concrete.
- By observing these simple suggestions you'll go a long way toward keeping your hardwood floors beautiful and making their care easier.

What type of finish do your floors have?

There are two principal types of finishes used on wood floors—penetrating seals and surface finishes. Each requires about the same care; but when it comes to removing stains or restoring the finish in heavy traffic areas, methods vary.

It is important for you to know how your floors were finished so you can decide on the proper floor care product. Your builder, realtor or flooring installer/finisher should be able to tell you what type of finish was used.

It will also be helpful to know the brand names of the finishing products, particularly the final finish coat. If your floors are factory finished note the name of the manufacturer. Keep this information in your household data file to help you determine the proper floor care products.

As a general rule you can be sure your plank or strip floor was finished at the factory if it has V-shaped grooves or bevels along the edges where the boards join and sometimes where the ends butt. This may



be only a slightly rolled edge, or a healthy bevel. NOTE: Plank flooring which has been custom finished at the job may have beveled/grooved edges.

If the floor has no bevels, it probably was custom finished on site after installation. To determine what kind of finishing was used, call the builder or floor finisher, if possible. When in doubt, try smudging the finish with a finger or scraping the finish with a fingernail or sharp instrument in a hidden area or corner of the room. If the smudge is noticeable or no clear finish material is scraped up, the floors have likely been waxed and maintenance should follow the guideline for penetrating sealer with wax.

If no noticeable smudge is evident and/or clear finish was scraped up, follow the maintenance procedure for a surface finish.

Surface Finishes

Polyurethane, “Swedish” finish, Moisture cure urethane, and Water-based urethanes, to name a few, are blends of synthetic resins, plasticizers, and other film-forming ingredients which remain on and protect the surface of the wood. All are durable moisture-resistant finishes. These finishes are generally available in high-gloss, semi-gloss, satin and matte, except moisture-cured urethane. Any one of the above surface finishes is a good choice. They are recommended finish for kitchens or similar areas where there is exposure to water splashing or spills.

NOTE: Penetrating sealers may have been used as an undercoat for surface finishes.

- “*Polyurethane*,” oil modified polyurethane, is generally the most common surface finish. The finish tends to amber slightly as it ages.
- “*Swedish Finish*,” acid curing urethane, is also a very durable finish, generally harder than polyurethane. These finishes are clear, fast-drying and resist yellowing. Moisture cure urethanes are the hardest finishes. Some are non-yellowing (check the can label). Gloss is the most common sheen.
- “*Water-based finishes*” are urethanes or blends of acrylics and urethanes that are fast drying, moisture resistant, durable, and resist yellowing. As the name implies the vehicular component is water. Most manufacturers of surface finishes recommend no waxing. Wax will, in most cases, be slippery. Once waxed, the floor may not be successful re-coated to rejuvenate it, but will have to be completely sanded down to raw wood to restore the finish.
- “*Varnish, Shellac and Lacquer finishes*” These are surface finishes rarely used today, and generally are not considered as durable as the more modern finishes. Shellacs are the softest and show water spots. Varnishes are harder but not to the extent of modern finishes and will show more ambering over time. Lacquers are hard and brittle and scratch easily (very



flammable when applied). Don't damp mop shellacs because of water spotting. You can use a slightly damp mop on the others if not previously waxed. For finishes which have been previously waxed, maintain by waxing occasionally. When traffic wear is noticeable, complete refinishing and changing to a newer finish is most often the preferred choice for repair.

- “*Polymer finishes*”-There is a third classification of finishes known as acrylic impregnated or an irradiated polymer. This is used primarily in commercial applications. Each brand of flooring using a polymer or acrylic impregnated finish have specific maintenance procedures which should be obtained from the manufacturer.

Caring for Surface Finishes on Your Floors

Vacuum and/or dust mop regularly.

For general cleaning of soiled areas, dip or spray a clean cloth with the manufacturer's recommended cleaner. The cloth should be slightly moistened, not wet. As you clean the floor with a mild cleaner (i.e. non-abrasive counter-type) follow by wiping with a sponge mop or cloth pad m op and dry up residue.

NOTE: Spray mist only as necessary. Do not apply moisture unnecessarily, vacuum instead. Contact the finish manufacturer to determine specific recommendations for cleaning the finish. Ammonia will damage or dull many surface finishes and should not be used to clean your floor.

Repairing a Surface Finish

With special care and skill, you may be able to repair polyurethane finishes yourself. Such repair may be necessary after stain removal or water damage. Use steel wool or fine sandpaper to remove layers of the finish from entire length of the affected boards. If necessary, stain and let dry completely. Apply the same type polyurethane as the original finish coats on surrounding strips. Read application direction. Taping the perimeter of the area with a quality release masking tape is helpful. Allow ample drying time. After the finish is dry, remove the tape.

CAUTION: Don't attempt this if you have an older varnish. The older finished are almost impossible to repair and match successfully. Lacquer and shellac, however, repair more easily.

For a small, relatively inconspicuous area you might get by cleaning with steel wool followed by paste wax. You won't get an exact match but it could serve as a temporary repair. The alternative is sanding to expose bare wood over the entire room and applying new finish.

Penetrating Seals

This finish has been widely used on residential floors. As its name implies, the sealer penetrates or soaks into the wood pores and hardens to seal the floor against dirt and certain stains. The penetrating sealer may also contain a stain to impart additional color to the flooring. These finishes may be used in



all areas but kitchens and daily eating areas where frequent water contact is likely. This finish does protect from surface moisture but will stain, dull and/or whiten if the moisture remains on it for more than a short period.

At the surface it delivers a low gloss satin finish that wears as the wood wears. The satin luster helps camouflage surface abuse. However, since the finish wears with the wood, eventually traffic lanes may show a lightened or dulled area. When an area does begin to show wear, it can be made to blend into the existing finish without lap marks or other obvious signs of repair.

The beauty and wear resistance of wood floors finished with a penetrating seal may be further enhanced by wax. A wax coating forms a barrier against the most frequent kind of abrasion, can be easily renewed, and imparts a soft shine to the floor.

Use wax with these two cautions: 1. the wax (liquid buffing or paste) **MUST BE DESIGNED FOR USE ON HARDWOOD FLOORS** and 2. don't use a liquid that has a water base. Check the label. Some manufacturers recommend their water-base products for wood, however, our association believes only solvent-base product should be used. Generally, solvent-based waxes will have the odor of mineral spirits.

Follow the manufacturer's directions for applying the wax and buff it well. This is done preferably with a 16-inch buffing machine available from rental companies. You may also buff small areas with a household buffer or by hand with a cloth or pads.

Caring for Penetrating Sealer and/or Wax Finishes

Vacuum and/or dust mop regularly.

Vacuuming is the best way to remove surface dust and dirt before it gets "walked into: the wax and dulls its luster. Vacuuming also pulls accumulated dust from the grooves of prefinished and plank floors.

When floor luster has dulled a bit and scuff marks begin to show, buff with a machine or by hand to restore luster and polish out scuffs.

After four to six months of wear, inspect your floors closely to see if there's been a dirt build-up or if the wax has discolored. If your floors were originally finished in a dark tone, you may see a lightening of the finish in traffic areas. After vacuuming and before any other procedure, buff an area, if the shine is not restored apply a new thin coat of wax. Buff well to restore the luster.

Smaller areas of floors finished with a penetrating sealer and/or wax can be repaired and re-waxed more easily than floors finished with a surface finish.



For smaller areas with imbedded dirt, abused areas, and lightened areas in traffic lanes, use a liquid cleaner or cleaner/wax combination.

Remember, make sure the products are solvent rather than water-base. The label may say it contains naphtha or petroleum distillate. Follow directions. For dark floors, choose a product in a compatible dark color. Spread it with steel wool. Rub to remove grime and the old wax, then wipe clean. Let floor dry. Buff if cleaner/wax combination was used or re-wax and buff if not. When using paste wax, wrap in a "wad" of cloth and apply an even thin coat. The warmth of your hand and rubbing friction melts the wax for proper application. If dull spots remain after drying apply a second coat to dull areas and repeat.

For general deep cleaning of excessively dirty floors, and refurbishing an entire floor to restore to near original conditions, use the liquid cleaners or restorers applied per directions with steel wool pads and a commercial buffer (15"-17" diameter). Follow with waxing using either a paste or liquid using the same buffer for final polishing.

If your floors are stained (colored), it's a good idea always to use a colored wax or cleaner to help maintain the original color. The best place for obtaining hardwood floor care products is your local dealer, which handles floor finishing products.

Caring for special surfaces

White and Bleached Floors-Because of their light color, these floors are usually lighter than the soil that accumulates on them, like white carpet or vinyl, they are more susceptible to showing the effects of dirt and traffic than natural or darker stained finishes. Therefore they need-and deserve-more attention than others. Vacuum or sweep often. Wipe up liquid spills immediately. Follow the maintenance procedures recommended for the type of finish used. With factory or on-the-job finishes the light-tinted or "white" floors most probably will have some shading changes over time.

Something else you'll probably notice with such finishes are tiny separations between the flooring strips during dry seasons or long heating periods. The amount of moisture in the air causes wood to expand or contract. When humidity levels are low, the flooring will contract and the separations become even more prominent than at other times. The contrast between a white floor surface causes even tiny separations to appear larger. Shrinkage and movement is a natural characteristic of wood and will occur with each heating season.

Distressed Wood- These are floors that have been wire brushed to remove the soft portion of the wood, giving it an antique, textured appearance. The resulting uneven surface tends to trap dirt, so we recommend vacuuming. If soil remains, sweep with a stiff bristle broom and re-vacuum.

Such floors are usually stained a dark color with penetrating sealers and waxed to further convey the aged wood effect. What remains after the wire brush treatment, however, are only the toughest wood fibers, and these are somewhat resistant to penetration by the finish color. That means more frequent



color renewal, which can be accomplished by the use of a wax or cleaner/wax combination of the proper color to maintain the original color tone.

Removing Stains

For floors with polyurethane or similar surface finishes, many stains can be prevented by simply wiping up the spilled liquid immediately.

For waxed floors, most stains can be prevented or minimized by keeping the floors waxed as previously suggested, and by wiping up any spilled liquid immediately. Here are some “first-aid” suggestions for common accidents.

When removing a stain, always begin at the outer edge and work toward the middle to prevent it from spreading.

1. Dried milk or food stain: You may remove the superficial dried material with a sharpened blade. Be careful not to scratch the finish. Rub spot with damp cloth. Rub dry. Re-wax for waxed finish.
2. Stains and spots caused by standing water.

For wax finish: Rub spot with No. 1 steel wool and re-wax. If this fails, sand lightly with fine sandpaper 90-120 grit. Clean spot and surrounding area using No. 1 or 0 steel wool and mineral spirits or a wood floor cleaner. Let floor dry. Apply matching finish on floor, feathering out into surrounding area. Wax after finish dries thoroughly. For surface finishes: Use recommended cleaner and buff vigorously with clean towel.

Dark Spots: For wax finish: A. Clean spot and surrounding area with No. 2 steel wool and a wood floor cleaner or mineral spirits. B. Thoroughly wash spotted area with household vinegar. Allow it to remain for three to four minutes. C. If spot remains, sand with fine sandpaper, follow the grain pattern of the wood, feathering out 3 to 4 inches into surrounding area, re-wax and polish. D. If two repeated application of vinegar do not remove the spot, apply oxalic acid solution directly on the spot. Proportions are one ounce oxalic acid to one quart water or fraction thereof.

CAUTION: This is a poison; use rubber gloves. Pour a small amount directly on the spot and let solutions stand one hour. Sponge spot with clear water. A second treatment may be helpful if spot refuses to yield. If second application of oxalic acid fails, sand area with No.80-120 grit sandpaper, follow the grain, and apply matching finish, feathering out into surrounding floor area. Let dry. Feathering out into surrounding floor area. Let dry. Buff lightly with No. 0 steel wool. Apply second coat of finish, let dry and wax. If spot is still visible, the only remaining remedy is to replace the affected flooring. (note: Oxalic acid is a bleaching agent. Whenever used, the treated floor area will probably have to be



stained and refinished to match the original color.) For surface finishes: Remove finish and treat as above, but do not wax. After area is thoroughly dry, coat with surface finish.

3. Heel Marks, caster marks, etc.: For Wax Finish: Rub vigorously with fine steel wool and wood floor cleaner. Wipe dry and polish. For surface finish: Use cleaner to wipe off mark. Some marks may be carefully scraped up with a sharpened blade.
4. Ink Stains: Follow same procedure as for other dark spots
5. Animal and diaper stains: Spots that are not too old may sometimes be removed in the same manner as other dark spots. If spots resist cleaning efforts replace affected strips, sand and finish.
6. Mold or Mildew: A surface condition caused by damp, stagnant air. After seeing that the proper ventilation is provided for the room- For waxed finish: The mold can usually be removed with a wood floor cleaning liquid and No. 1 steel wool. For surface finishes- If mold is on the surface, wipe up with appropriate cleaner. If mold is under the finish, refinishing is necessary.
7. Chewing gum, crayon, candle wax: Scrape the major residue with razor blade. Apply ice until the deposit is brittle enough to crumble off. Cleaning fluid poured around the area (not on it) can seep under the deposit and loosen it.
8. Cigarette burns: For waxed finish: If not too deep, steel wool will often remove them. Moisten steel wool with soap and water to increase effectiveness. Re-wax. For surface finishes- Scraping the affected area only with a sharpened blade. Apply a dab of finish where the finish has been scraped away.
9. Alcohol spot: For waxed finish- Rub with liquid or paste wax, silver polish, boiled linseed oil, or cloth barely dampened in ammonia. Re-wax. For surface finishes: Generally not affected.
10. Oil and grease stains: For waxed finish: Rub on a kitchen soap having a high lye content, TSP (tri sodium phosphate) or saturate cotton with hydrogen peroxide and place over the stain; then saturate a second layer of cotton with ammonia and place over the first. Repeat until the stain is removed. NOTE Ammonia may discolor the wood. For surface finishes: Wipe up with mineral spirits or TSP (tri sodium phosphate). Buff with clean pad or towel.
11. Wax build-up: Oak floors that have not had proper care may acquire wax build-up. Strip all the old wax away with mineral spirits or a wood floor cleaner. Use cloths and fine steel wool to clean and remove the entire residue before applying new wax. It's a good idea to perform this complete stripping job every now and then. Stripping removes all the old wax and dirt that partially hides the beauty and color of the wood grain and builds up inevitably over a period time.



Refinishing

Wood floors that have become unsightly from years of wear or neglect can be restored to their original beauty. Machine sanding removes the old finish and exposes new wood. With the application of finishing material, floors are like new again. While the highly skilled home craftsman may want to undertake the task of refinishing, it is usually advisable to have a professional floor refinisher do the work to be assured of best results.

Standard wood tones or other colors are readily available in penetrating sealers. Coloring floors with pigmented penetrating sealer will not obscure the grain markings.

The general term for adding any tone to a wood floor is “staining.” But stains get their color from dyes or pigments, which are sensitive to light, so stained floors may fade if exposed to continued brightness. For this reason, we recommend the use of penetrating sealers containing staining pigments for most refinishing.

Cracks and Squeaks. What to do if they occur.

All the wood in your home will contract or expand according to the moisture in the air. Doors and windows may swell and stick during rainy seasons. In dry, cold weather, cracks and fine lines of separation may appear in wall cabinets and furniture. This characteristic of wood because wood is a product of nature, and its natural quality is what makes it desirable.

Cracks—The same reaction to humidity or the lack of it is happening constantly in your wood floors. Tiny cracks between edges of boards may appear when dry conditions are produced by your heating system. This can usually be REDUCED simply by installing a humidifier. Both family and floors benefit from a healthier environment and a balance of moisture content in the house.

Squeaks—When interiors become damp in rainy weather, boards may expand so that edges rub together and produce a squeak. Improper fastening of the floor or subfloor can also cause squeaks. To correct this, first try lubrication.

A liberal amount of liquid wax may do the job with waxed floors. Or sift a small amount of powdered soap stone, talcum powder, or powdered graphite between adjacent boards where the noise occurs. Another method is to drive triangular glazier points between the strips using a putty knife to set them below the surface.

If that doesn't work, drive 2" finishing nails through pilot holes drilled into the face of the flooring. Nails should be placed near edges of the boards. Set them with a nail set and hide with matching color putty. The best solution requires more work and can be accomplished only where there is access beneath the floor (crawl space or basement). This involves placing wood screws from below. They are inserted



through the subfloor and into the finish floor to pull the flooring strips tight to the subfloor. Our association has instructions on doing this and will be glad to furnish you with a copy at no charge.

