

# The Ripple Effect

Homeowner seems less than honest about this finish problem

By Steven Johnston

## The Problem

I recently received a claim from a manufacturer on an engineered wood floor that a homeowner said had bubbling finish. The homeowner explained that when they moved in, the floor was fine; it was not until two to three months later that they noticed the problem.

## The Procedure

The floor was 3/8-inch-thick, 3-inch-wide, five-ply prefinished engineered cherry plank that was direct-glued over a wood substrate in a new home. The homeowner said other neighbors had the exact same floor, and, as far as he knew, none of them were having this problem, so

he figured his floor was defective. For maintenance, he claimed only a dry Swiffer was used, with an occasional damp-wipe when necessary.

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## The Cause

After arriving and visually inspecting the

wood floor, I saw that almost half the floor was affected; the finish had a rippled appearance, but was limited to random areas. Some planks were affected on one end but were fine on the other. Some planks were affected with no planks on either side affected, elsewhere there were groups of two to five planks affected, and I noticed dried moisture streaks on several planks. This was a clear sign of forced splintered separation of the layers, so I again asked what maintenance products were being used on the floor, and he reiterated what he told me initially. I made sure to get pictures of the dried moisture streaks.

I used a pin meter on planks that had not been affected and got pictures of the readings, which (adjusted for the species) were in the 9-10 percent MC range. I checked several wavy planks and got readings ranging from 16-20 percent MC in the affected areas. I took pictures of the

overall floor to show the extent of the damage.

Once I completed the inspection, it was evident defective wood was not the reason for the floor failure. The floor had been fine for the first couple of months after the homeowner had moved in; I concluded that the floor failed because he used some wet method of cleaning or even possibly a steamer-based method. Although the homeowner claimed otherwise, the moisture readings and pictures told a different story.

## How to Fix the Floor

Due to the extent of flooring damaged at this point, the wood flooring would have to be replaced with new flooring. Unfortunately, the last I heard, once the homeowner got the letter from the manufacturer denying the claim, he was thinking about claiming there had been an appliance leak so his insurance would cover the cost of the damage.

## In the Future

With any type of installation, it is important that the homeowner know proper care guidelines. There are many cleaning products today that claim to be appropriate for wood floors but aren't recommended by wood flooring manufacturers. In this age of technology, though, it is easy to access the correct information. Most manufacturers have a Web site that states how to care for their floors; if not, there is a toll-free number. If homeowners don't know the manufacturer, they can call the NWFPA for general maintenance guidelines. Also, retailers and contractors might want to provide the consumer with a maintenance kit as a goodwill gesture, which can even lead to the customer coming back to buy more cleaning products or flooring down the road. If the homeowners still don't maintain the floor the way they should and end up with a problem, before the inspector arrives, they should at least wipe off the fingerprints (or, as in this case, dried moisture streaks)! ■

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