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Understanding Your Wood Floors

In a comfortable home with slight humidity variations through the seasons, wood flooring responds by expanding and contracting. These changes may be noticeable. During warm, humid weather, wood expands. During colder dry weather wood shrinks. This seasonal movement is normal characteristic of wood flooring. This movement never stops, regardless of the age of the wood. With the wide variation of weather in the St. Louis area, homeowners can expect changes in their wood floor throughout the seasons. Gapping, squeaking and creaking will occur as the floor expands and contracts. One of the best ways to ensure wood flooring will continue to perform at a high level of expectation is to control the humidity in the home and properly maintain your wood floors with an approved cleaning products and methods.

Working with Humidity Controls

Wood floors perform best when the interior environment's relative humidity range is kept between 35-50%. The temperature range from 60-80 degrees Fahrenheit is acceptable. Wood is a natural material that is hygroscopic, it constantly reacts to the moisture (relative humidity), high or low in the home's environment.

Ideal Conditions:

- Relative humidity: 45%.- 50% Rh
- Temperature: 68 - 72 degrees Fahrenheit

It is extremely important to avoid major swings in temperature and humidity. Keep the environment surrounding your wood floor at the "normal" living conditions as described above. Heating systems, air exchanges, air conditioning, humidifiers, dehumidifiers, and thermostats are all examples of mechanical systems that can be used to control the home's environmental conditions. Most wood manufactures recommend that you leave the HVAC system's fan switch in the "On" position to help provide a flow of air across the floor.

The key to preventing future problems with your hardwood flooring is to keep the home's environment with in a normal living condition year-round. If these guidelines are not maintained, damage to your wood floor will be most likely to occur. Some of these objectionable appearances can be, but are not limited to, cupping, cracking splits, cracks, gaps at joints, delamination of ply, finish issues such as peeling, flaking, chipping, buckling or noises emitting from the floor when walked on.

General Maintenance

The enjoyment of wood flooring depends on some routine but minimal maintenance details.

- Sweep your floors or use a dust mop daily.
- Vacuum your floor regularly, as often as you would vacuum carpets.
- Clean your floor's coated surface with a lightly dampened cloth using a recommended cleaning product according to the manufacture directions for use.
 - Different finishes have different maintenance requirements. It is best to follow professional advice in this area.
 - Do not use a household dust treatment, as this may cause your floors to become slick or dull the finish.
 - Never damp mop a wood floor. Water causes deterioration of the wood itself, as well as the finish, and increases the relative humidity in the wood.
- Clean light stains by rubbing with a damp cloth.
- Never let a spill of water dry on the floor.
- Apply felt pads on all furniture legs to minimize scratches.
 - Clean the pads when you clean your floor to remove any grit that may have accumulated.
 - Floors can be recoated as needed periodically as the finish shows wear.

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