

Forward to Warranty - How about the Truth !

The Truth

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

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

Lifetime Finish Warranty & Lifetime Structural Warranty ! Some offer 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 Flooring International would like to look at two separate issues:

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 water or also will draw in/give away water from the humidity in the atmosphere and/or also from the subfloor the flooring touches.
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/shrinks), than solid wood flooring. However, engineered wood flooring still shrinks/swells as it gains/loses moisture ! And just like a sponge, wood flooring can crown or cup depending on how much and from where the floor gains/loses moisture.

Each species of wood shrinks/swells at a lesser/greater rate unique to each species. This is a simple mathematic formula. (See Wood Flooring International's Species Technical Information – [www.wflooring.com/Species Movement-in-Service Chart](http://www.wflooring.com/Species%20Movement-in-Service%20Chart)). 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 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/softness of the wood underneath the finish, the wood itself will dent to an even greater/lesser degree in direct proportion to the wood's hardness. See Wood FLooring International's hardness chart at www.wflooding.com/Species 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 Usual 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 – (only if not soaked in water, either from below/above).
- 2) Engineered Wood Flooring – will not move – (only if not soaked in water from above or below and if installed on a site that is maintained with a relative humidity between 40% and 60%).

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On Finish:

- 1) Will not peel/blister – (only if not soaked in water or exposed to chemicals/solvents/alkalines/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 35% or above 65%.
- 5) Failure to protect the floors from sand/grit, pets, high heels, chair/furniture w/o 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/gloss levels to be a defect – only peeling or complete wear through is.

Conclusion

So the answer to the question - Is one manufacturer's warranty of “Lifetime” better than another at ten years? - is that 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 Flooring International's approach to warranties is to be realistic about product performance and equally open about our warranty and its limitations. Our fine print is reserved only for legalese.

Wood FLooring International is also committed to using the latest technological advances in finish and engineering as they become available, always offering the finest flooring on the market.