



Home Clean-up and Renovation — Floors



Warped and De-Laminated Floors

Not all warped wood flooring can be repaired. The extent of damage will depend partly on the kind of material used in the floor. Different woods react differently to dampness or flooding.

Plywood

Many homes have plywood subfloors. Plywood usually separates (de-laminates) when exposed to excessive moisture. This will make the covering material (carpet, sheet-flooring or tile) buckle. Consult a reliable contractor for this work.

A small section of the subfloor that has separated can be replaced with new plywood. If the entire floor has de-laminated, either remove the entire subfloor and replace it, or nail new plywood over the old. Thoroughly dry the subfloor before recovering it.

Hardwood

Badly-warped hardwood floors usually can't be repaired. If the floor is clearly unrepairable, take it up and discard it. Allow subflooring to dry for several months before installing another floor over it.

To repair slightly warped hardwood floors:

- ① Clean and dry the floor completely before attempting any repairs. This may take weeks or even months.
- ② If the floor is still warped in places when it is dry, remove strips adjacent to the bulges and plane them on their edges. This will give more space for the warped boards to flatten out in time. (If boards are tongue and groove, consult a carpenter about the special techniques necessary for this work.)
- ③ You may be able to draw some buckled flooring into place by nailing the bulged spots. Some humps may be removed by planing or sanding. Heavily planed or sanded floors, though unsuitable to be used uncovered, can serve as a base for new flooring or for carpet or resilient floor covering.

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Pine

Warped wide pine board flooring will often flatten out after it has thoroughly dried. Clean the floor and let it dry for several months. Using the furnace as much as possible during the drying time will speed up the process. Do not try to repair the floor until it is dry. If any boards are still slightly warped when dry, use the same technique as for warped hardwood floors (see Hardwood section).

When laying a new floor or subfloor, remove baseboards and moldings. The finished floor should be the same level as the original floor, if possible. If floor level changes, doors must be refitted to the new level. Consult a carpenter before trying this.

Repairing Flooded Tile, Linoleum and Vinyl Floor Coverings

Subfloor

“Long submersion will loosen adhesives and warp subflooring. If a plywood or hardwood subfloor is wet, you should probably remove the linoleum or vinyl and replace the subfloor material.”

Water coming up from below will cause the most damage to subfloor material. If a linoleum or vinyl floor covering is not under water many days, the floor covering may partially protect the subfloor material. Long submersion, however, will loosen adhesives and warp subflooring. If a plywood or hardwood subfloor is wet, you should probably remove the linoleum or vinyl and replace the subfloor material.

Removing Loosened Floor Coverings

Some floor coverings may crack or break when you try to loosen them. Contact a reputable dealer to find out what solvent will loosen adhesives with a minimal amount of damage to linoleum or vinyl. Heating with a heat lamp or propane torch may make the covering less brittle. How easily the covering can be lifted depends on the material and adhesive. If the adhesive is waterproof, it may be difficult, if not impossible, to remove the floor covering without considerable damage.

Tiles

If the floor has not been badly soaked, you may not need to replace the subfloor. It is possible to re-cement loosened tiles of any type. Be sure the floor is thoroughly dry before trying to re-cement.

Blisters may be left in the linoleum tiles after warped wooden flooring has dried. Carefully puncture each blister with a nail. With a hand syringe, force diluted linoleum paste through the hole, and weigh the linoleum down with bricks.



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Sheet Linoleum or Vinyl

Water may have seeped under a loose section of vinyl or sheet linoleum. Carefully remove the entire sheet. Allow the floor to dry thoroughly before trying to re-cement the linoleum. Thorough drying may take as long as six weeks or more. Use a new sheet of lining felt before re-cementing the floor covering.

Cleaning Flooded Floors and Woodwork

Cleaning

- ① Shovel out the worst of the mud and silt before it dries. Use a hose if necessary.
- ② Before the house has dried out, scrub floors and woodwork with a stiff brush, plenty of water, a detergent and a disinfectant. Remove mud and silt from corners, cracks and crevices.
- ③ Water may have accumulated in partitions and exterior walls. Drain these areas by removing baseboard and drilling holes between studs a few inches above the floor. You may need to remove sections of the wallboard or plaster so that wall studding and interior can dry thoroughly—a process that may take months.
- ④ Give floors a final thorough washing with a non-sudsing cleaning product.



Removing Surface Mildew

- ① Heat the room to a temperature of 50 to 60 F to help dry mildewed wood.
- ② Scrub mildewed floors and woodwork with a mild alkali solution such as washing soda or tri-sodium phosphate (4 to 6 tablespoons to a gallon of water), available in paint and grocery stores. Or use a cloth dipped in hot water and a small amount of kerosene, or in a mixture of borax dissolved in hot water.
- ③ Rinse with clear water.
- ④ Wipe clean floors dry with old towels.
- ⑤ Allow wood to dry thoroughly.
- ⑥ Apply a mildew-resistant paint after woodwork has thoroughly dried.
- ⑦ Replace badly-infected wood.



Bleaching Wood Stained by Mildew

- ① Remove paint or varnish with paint remover with room well-ventilated.
- ② Apply a solution of 3 tablespoons oxalic acid dissolved in a pint of water to the stains. (Oxalic acid crystals can be purchased at drug stores.)

CAUTION: Oxalic acid is poisonous. Label it clearly and keep out of children's reach.

- ③ Rinse with clear water. Wipe dry.
- ④ Dry thoroughly before refinishing.

Refinishing

You may prefer to have floors professionally refinished. If you decide to do the work yourself:

- ① Be sure floors and subfloors are thoroughly dry.
- ② Sand the surface until it is clean and smooth. Heavily-planed floors may never look good again, but they can serve as a base for carpeting, tile or sheet flooring.
- ③ If floor is oak, apply a filler; then apply two coats of a penetrating floor seal or spar varnish. Sand between coats.
- ④ Apply varnish, following directions on can.
- ⑤ Treat fir flooring in the same way, but omit the filler.



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