

Finish Odors

When wood floors are finished, there is often an odor that lingers while the finish is curing. These fumes are a result of off-gassing, which is a normal chemical reaction that occurs during the drying process. Typically, these fumes are not harmful, but it is important to wear the appropriate respirator when applying finish of any type. The type of respirator that should be used will vary depending on the type of finish being applied, the specifics of the jobsite, and the physical characteristics of the refinisher. For example, a partial face respirator may not be effective for refinishers with full beards because a tight seal cannot be achieved. Always follow the finish manufacturer recommendations.

Finish fumes may be more of a concern for homeowners who do not deal with them every day. In these cases, it may be helpful to suggest ways that they can minimize the fumes after you have ensured the finish is completely dry.

Open Windows: Finish fumes will diminish over time, but increasing ventilation in the room will help the process. Allowing air to flow through the room will help the fumes to dissipate more quickly. Note that ceiling fans will not accomplish this. Ceiling fans move air around a room, but do not ventilate them.

Use Box Fans: Putting a box fan in an open window can help increase ventilation in the room, which helps diminish fumes. Using two box fans with one blowing air in and one blowing air out is even more effective.

Turn Up the Heat: Increasing the heat in the room will help remove fumes more quickly. If the exterior temperature is less than 50 degrees, be sure to heat the room to allow curing to continue as intended.

Change Air Filters: Air filters can hold odors, so should be changed after finish is applied. If fumes are trapped in a filter, air moving through them can redistribute odors throughout the home.



Clean Fabrics: Fabrics can hold odors, so should be removed prior to finish being applied, or cleaned after finish has been applied. This can include upholstery, draperies, pillows, textile artwork, etc.

Maintain Floors: Clean the floors using a wood floor cleaning product recommended by the manufacturer. This will help to reduce finish odors.

More-detailed information about finishing wood floors and finish odors is available in the NWFA Wood Flooring Sand and Finish Guidelines publication, or at <http://member.nwfa.org/?page=SandFinish>.