National Wood Flooring Association

Wood Floor Facts

Insect Infestations

Insect infestations are not common in wood floors, but they can occur. Many people know that termites are often associated with the destruction of wood products, but beetles can infest wood as well.

The most common destructive beetle associated with wood floors is called the lyctid beetle. It is often referred to as the powderpost beetle because the damage it causes reduces wood to a powder-like consistency.

A powderpost beetle is a wood-boring insect that is reddish brown to black, about 1/32”-1/8” in length, and has an elongated, flattened body (Figure 1). Because this beetle is quite small, the damage they can cause is much more likely to be seen than the beetle itself.

Figure 1
Adult Lyctid Beetle
Photo credit: Bigstock

Figure 2
Lyctid Beetle Frass
Photo credit: NWFA

Powderpost beetles also may not originate in wood flooring. They can be introduced into the structure in wood furniture, cabinets, paneling, moldings, firewood, and even picture frames and small decorative grape vine wreaths, so identifying the primary source is necessary to alleviate the problem and keep it from spreading.

Infestation occurs long before the wood floor is installed. Female lyctid beetles lay their eggs within the pores of the wood. The larvae feed on the wood, creating tunnels that fill with a powdery substance called frass. Later, when the larvae mature, they exit the wood, creating small pinholes, generally measuring 1-3mm. These exit holes will often be surrounded by frass (Figure 2). This frass material is very fine and will feel like talcum powder when rubbed between two fingers.

This infestation typically occurs in hardwood lumber. Kiln drying lumber will eliminate powderpost beetles, but infestations can occur at any point in the supply chain, including production, storage and transport. US wood species are not prone to powderpost beetle infestations due to the industry standards utilized for drying and storing lumber, but imported wood species do not necessarily following these stringent requirements and may be more prone to infestations.

Not all pinholes in wood flooring indicate that powderpost beetles are present. Small pin holes in the face of wood products are a natural characteristic of wood, and will not damage the floor or affect its performance. In addition, any wood product that has been in use for five years or longer is very unlikely to have powderpost beetles as the starch content of the wood, which the beetle needs to survive, declines as the wood ages.

If powderpost beetles are suspected, a wood flooring professional can evaluate the floors and recommend a course of action for repairs. Find one at http://woodfloors.org/find-a-professional-2.aspx.

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