

Violand Flooring Inspections, Inc.

Allergies and flooring

“Healthy homes” and “allergy free” are all current buzzwords. How can your flooring help you achieve these goals? While many other things you can put in your home will state “VOC free” or “Certified Allergy Free”, flooring meets these requirements as well. While there are certain people who still may be sensitive to odors or chemicals, flooring meets or exceeds California Air Resource Board (CARB) Regulations.

I remember several years ago there was an ad for a furnace filter. It showed dust, pollen, and dander floating up in the air as a child ran across a hardwood floor. This commercial was of course to show that the furnace filter was better at filtering the air making a cleaner home. What I saw was the amount of material floating up in the air around the child. Children are shorter than adults and can be affected by things stirred up on the floor more than adults.

So what is the best flooring for allergies? Carpet. Now before you get all up in arms about that statement, let me go through all the other flooring options first so you can make your own educated decision.

Vinyl – Several manufacturers have achieved “Certified Asthma & Allergy Friendly” certifications from The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. What does this mean? For flooring that means that: “Allergy Standards Ltd (ASL) subjects the Floor Covering to both physical and chemical testing to ensure that the Floor Covering does not have properties that are likely to irritate both asthma and allergy symptoms in susceptible people:

1. The Floor Covering should have a low capacity for allergen retention
2. The manufacturer’s recommended cleaning procedures must be effective at removing accumulated allergen from the Floor Covering
3. The recommended cleaning procedures of the Floor Covering must not contribute to a significant increase in airborne allergen levels that may result in redistribution of rather than overall reduction of allergen
4. Exposure to airborne solvents and other irritant or toxic materials during Floor Covering installation and thereafter when in use must not exceed Certification thresholds”

<https://www.allergystandards.com/the-science-behind-the-certification/>

With vinyl flooring, it is easily cleaned and regular wet and vacuumed cleanings will result in fewer allergens that have settled on the floor. Cleaning a vinyl floor can kick up allergens but they are usually captured quickly during cleaning. All vinyl flooring has low VOCs and the adhesives used to install the products are usually water-based and have low VOCs.

Wood and Laminate – Both of these floor types are similar to vinyl. While care and maintenance is slightly different in the amount of water recommended for cleaning, they clean the same as a vinyl floor. Both are low in VOCs and while there was an issue with hazardous chemicals in laminate flooring, anything that is CARB compliant will not have issues. Look for products made in the USA or Canada for the best results in being CARB compliant and low VOCs. There are some very good imported products, look for ones that are not being liquidated and are not cheap.

Ceramic/Porcelain – When it became popular being VOC free and allergen friendly, the tile people said “we’ve had that for hundreds of years”. They’re right! While the manufacture of tile involves sand, cement and small particulates, the finished tile contains these products in a solid, rigid tile that even

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when broken, will not contribute much dust to the air. According to the Tile Council of North America: “The high firing temperature of ceramic tile – generally more than 2000°F – burns off all organic compounds. Plus, ceramic tile is inhospitable to bacteria, fungi, mold, and other irritants that contribute to allergies and asthma. All this allows ceramic and glass tiles to easily meet low-emitting material requirements, contribute to pre-occupancy air quality plans, and provide superior indoor air quality for building occupants.”

https://www.tcnatile.com/images/pdfs/2014_Tile_the_Natural_Choice_locked_web_PDF.pdf

They are also as easy to clean as vinyl floors.

Carpet – I’ve heard it all: “carpet is dirty”, “carpet leaves dust”, “the last time we got carpet, we all got sick”. I challenge each of those laments. Is the carpet dirty because it isn’t being vacuumed and cleaned frequently enough? When do you see the dust, right after it is installed? The last one proves the point that carpet is the most allergy friendly product. According to the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI): “A 15-year Swedish study found no link between carpet usage and the incidence of allergy or asthma. In fact, when carpet usage in Sweden decreased by 70 percent, allergy reactions in the general population increased by 30 percent.”

<http://www.carpet-rug.org/downloadable-fact-sheets.html>

Carpet is an air filter. While it will release some fibers from processing shortly after installation, these fibers are easily vacuumed up and will diminish within a few days. With carpet being an air filter, it will capture all the allergens that are floating in the air to be released when the carpet is vacuumed. I always recommend a bagged, High Efficiency Particulate Arrestance (HEPA) filtered vacuum. Why bagged? The bags are usually HEPA filters and if not, they are a filter. And bagless canisters, in order not to reintroduce the dust back into the air, should be emptied in a trash can outside the home. A more thorough cleaning by hot water extraction will reduce the amount of allergens in the carpet. So when people have a reaction when they get new carpet, it is usually because all the allergens that were trapped in the old carpet have been shaken loose and are floating in the air.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Proper care and maintenance is always most important in having a healthy home and reducing allergens. Frequent vacuuming and cleaning of soft and hard surfaces (yes, vacuum your couch!) will encapsulate most allergens. Regularly changing the filter in your furnace will also help improve air quality. In today’s age of reduced indoor air quality, it is important to do what we can to help our indoor air be as clean as possible.



Jessica Violand Bruno has been a flooring inspector since 2006. She is an Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC) Senior Carpet Inspector and also holds certifications to inspect wood, laminate and resilient floors as well. In addition to inspecting flooring she is a lead sales associate with a flooring wholesaler. This job gives her a unique perspective where she works with contractors and installers but also has to know the products well for the consuming public. Each job gives her a unique perspective on why consumers choose what they want, and the limitations that some homes and contractors face, and the lack of education for retailers.

Her desire is to help you gain a new understanding of the importance of knowing your product, knowing your project, and knowing how to make your investment last.

For information or help regarding flooring inspections, product information or other services we provide, please call me at 330-807-6702 or email me at Jessica@mark4floors.com