

Dogs and timber floors – the key points

We all love our dogs but what are the things you ought to be aware of in relation to man's best friend and your finished timber floor?

Scratches – The total film thickness of the polyurethane coating on a finished timber floor is about 0.1 mm and so like any coated surface if you have something sharp or pointed it is possible to damage it. However, the vast majority of the time where it is thought that a dog's claws have 'scratched' a floor what has actually happened is that the wood itself has been indented. The performance of a floor with regard to physical damage is controlled by the timber species. Hardwood species can vary greatly in density and resistance to impact damage but generally hardwoods can be considered to be more resistant than softwoods species, which are softer and mark easily.

No finish system can make a wooden floor 'harder' or prevent / reduce the physical damage caused by furniture, dropped / dragged items or dog claws. Bona finishes will however 'bend' and 'follow' the indentation. If you look closely you often will be able to use a fingernail to feel the indentation but can see that there is no break in the finish and the wood is still protected against spillage, wear and scuffing.

A dog that is walked regularly on pavements and has regular claw trimming generally leaves few marks but a heavy dog with sharp claws can have a point loading of many kg per mm which can potentially affect the wood. It is important with all dogs to try to minimize 'inside play'. It is fun to throw a ball down a corridor or see your dog chasing around the sofa but obviously this increases the chances of damage to the floor.

Spillage – This can cover a lot of different things and dog owners need to take some steps to reduce the possible effects. The most obvious one is food and water from bowls. Ideally, the bowls are not on your wooden floor but if they have to be then investing in a good size rubber mat that can capture spillage is a good idea. Take care though as some rubber / plastics can 'bleed' plasticizers that can mark floors so take advice when you buy and ask if this is known to be an issue with the mats you are looking at.

Puppies can pose problems with toilet training in the early days as can persistent urine issues if left for a long time, particularly on rugs / mats in our experience. Providing that the spillage is cleaned up in a reasonable period of time, you use an enzyme spray to deal with the cleaning process rather than bleach or vinegar, and can dissuade the dog from going back to the same place, then generally there are no issues. Left for a long time, or with repeated incidents on the same spot, it is possible for dog urine to pass through all types of floor finishes into the wood below. This can result in a dark patch appearing where chemicals in the urine react with the timber. Where dogs go on a mat this will 'hold' the material against the floor and can mean a more serious issue is seen, often with dye from the mat being released to damage the flooring.

Flea sprays are something to be wary of. These products usually contain a high proportion of aromatic solvents with the intention being that the solvents aid the penetration of the active ingredients through the skin of the dog. If you get overspray or the dog shakes vigorously after treatment then the spray droplets get left on the coated floor. Occasionally these drops can chemically affect the polyurethane causing small white marks / 'blisters' to appear. Other similar chemical sprays with volatile solvent carriers include insect / fly spray, leather spray polish, window cleaners, air fresheners, etc.

Dirt, hair and drool... - All three are part of having a dog. There is a pretty good chance that your best friend will bring dirt and water into the house, particularly if your dog hares around the garden treating the lawn and flowerbeds like a racetrack. Good mats inside and out at external doors, particularly if you have a doggie door, are a must. If you can catch them and wipe paws with a towel when the weather is wet so much the better.

Some dogs shed lots of hair but even if you have a breed or designer dog that loses very little there will always be some on the floor, the furniture, etc. You also have to consider that your dog may have a favourite spot where it lays directly onto the floor. Unfortunately, dog hair can be quite abrasive and, in some cases, can dull the surface of the floor. It is important to keep it under control to prevent damage occurring. The dull patch in front of the window may very well be down to your dog constantly rolling and turning in the sun...

If you have a breed like a bulldog or a mastiff no one needs to tell you about the drool... So long as you wipe it up there will be no issues but again, like with dog hair, if there is a 'favourite' dog drooling spot then over some time you may see some staining of the surface.

With some understanding of the potential issues that the presence of dogs brings to timber floors then it is possible to take steps to protect your floor against some and greatly reduce the effects of others. Inevitably the appearance of the floor will be affected to some extent over time but providing some basic steps are taken to reduce the possible impacts of your dog the floor will perform well. Regular maintenance of the floor and planning for overcoating of the floor will keep the floor in a good condition.