

Good Practice Installation Tips

1. Only install a laminate or hard floor surface on a clear, level, prepared sub-floor and only ever with an underlay designed to reduce impact noise transmission.
2. The floor surface should be a 'floating' layer, so there are no nails or fixings passing through the underlay surface.
3. The floor should not be butted up hard to walls, skirting boards or protruding pipes. A small gap should be left at around the edge of the floor surface.

Quiet Neighbour Tips

1. Avoid wearing outdoor footwear on hard floor surfaces, particularly high heeled shoes.
2. Use rugs, particularly above neighbour's bedrooms and living rooms.
3. Fit felt pads under chairs and tables.

Further Information

The following web sites provide further information on the influence of hardfloor finishes on neighbour noise:

1. *Improving sound insulation in existing dwellings and designing for conversions*
sbe.napier.ac.uk/bpc/sound/index.html
2. Department for the environment and rural affairs (Defra). Noise and Nuisance research pages 'Noise control from laminated and wooden flooring'.
www.defra.gov.uk/environment/noise/research/hardfloors/
3. Scottish Executive's Noise and Nuisance Pages
www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Pollution/Noise-Nuisance
4. The European Producers of Laminate Floor (EPLF). Most questions answered about laminate floors.
www.eplf.com/en



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Neighbour Noise Between Flats:

The influence of laminate and hardwood flooring



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

What noise?

The laying of a laminate or hardwood floor in place of carpet results in more impact noise (footsteps, chair scrape, dropped items) travelling into the floor. These noises can quickly become an annoyance for downstairs neighbours, often without the upper property being aware of it.

Who is at Risk?

Laminate and hardwood flooring is an attractive alternative to carpet but is not recommended for every type of building. Residential flats are generally designed to take carpeted floors; hard timber floor finishes are not normally suitable in these buildings because of their susceptibility to impact noise transmission. Flats affected by impact noise problems can also suffer from more general issues of poor sound insulation i.e. hearing noise from neighbouring properties such as voices, TV, stereo etc.

Before removing soft floor coverings, it is recommended that you speak to your downstairs neighbour about the existing level of sound insulation between properties in order to identify if the sound insulation is good enough to allow the use of a hard floor surface. If the sound insulation between flats is described as only 'Satisfactory' or worse, it is recommended against either revealing floorboards or installing timber laminate or hardwood floor surfaces within an upper floor flat.

It is generally only specially designed flats with substantial floor structures that are able to feature hard floor surfaces without causing adverse neighbour reaction.

What can be done?

New laminate and hardwood floors should always be laid on an underlay. This extra layer helps level the sub-floor, prevents the joints from cracking and helps extend the life of the floor. Their use also helps reduce the amount of impact noise passed through the floor, although underlays do not prevent all noise and are considerably less effective

than carpets at reducing neighbour footstep noise. Advice on appropriate underlays, specially designed to reduce impact noise transmission, can be obtained from the flooring manufacturers.

Legal Considerations

Prior to the purchase and installation of new laminate or hardwood flooring in an upper floor flat confirmation should be made that there are no tenancy or deed conditions forbidding their use.

If you live in a lower flat and are affected by neighbour noise there are limited options to address the problem. Whilst a legal option can be tried, progress is only likely to be achieved where the root issue can be attributed to structural alteration of the floor or unreasonable behaviour by the residents. Further advice on dealing with noise problems and accessing mediation services is available from the Local Authority's Environmental Health Department.



Neighbour noise complaints caused by hard floor surfaces have increased sharply over recent years. Problems arise when carpets and underlays are replaced by hard floor surfaces and previously muffled sounds of footsteps, chair scrapes and dropped items become distinct and intrusive for downstairs neighbours.