

## Basement Flooring

Selecting a basement floor can be an overwhelming part of your basement finishing project. Many different materials are available-carpet, tile, laminate, engineered wood and others. Here are some important points to keep in mind when making your decision.

First of all you will need to determine how well your flooring will have to hold up to traffic and moisture. The material you choose will have a great impact on the look, feel and overall warmth of the space.

Wall to wall style carpeting will be the warmest option. The carpet and pad will act as an insulator from the cold concrete underneath.

I personally prefer a short napped carpet with lots of darker colors in it. This stuff is rather indestructible. The new stain repellent products built right in do a great job of protecting the carpet from damage by spills and other "topical" issues.

Further, if you have a family pet who is not de-clawed, this style of carpet won't be hurt by their nails. Berber carpets, a style of carpeting with loops, can incur damage caused by caught pet nails. The loops get snagged and are pulled out of their original position.

If your floor is fairly smooth, carpet and pad are easily tacked down and stretched directly on top of the concrete. It's important that once the carpet is stretched it lays flat across the ENTIRE floor.

A very uneven floor will have pockets where the carpet is unsupported underneath. Before long the carpet will further stretch and look poor. A good solution would be to simply glue the carpet down. No pad is used in glued carpet installations.

Realize that water is a threat to carpet. If the carpet is dried out immediately via water extraction or from physical removal it will probably be salvageable and be able to be re-used. Only water extraction will be feasible with a glued carpet. Be sure to have both the carpet and pad (if applicable) professionally tested for dryness and cleanliness. Either one can mold if not perfectly dry. More than likely the pad will need to be replaced if there was a lot of water.

## Laminate/Engineered flooring

Laminate and engineered flooring are very beautiful and look great in a basement. The material and installation is more expensive than carpet but usually cheaper than using a ceramic tile.

Laminate is essentially sawdust and glue. It is made under great pressure and a lot of heat. The laminate finish is a picture of wood covered with a tough coating.

Engineered wood is a real finish on top of a plywood core. It can scratch just as a conventional hardwood floor.

Both materials are installed over a pad and “float.” What this means is that the floor adheres only to itself, either with glue or the flooring pieces lock together. The floor is not attached to any of the walls. This allows for expansion and contraction of the material as temperatures fluctuate.

The finishes on laminate are very tough. They are very sturdy and wear well.

Engineered flooring finishes are tough too – although not as tough as laminate.

Your basement floor must be VERY level and smooth for proper laminate and engineered wood installation. Even so, when you walk on the floor you will probably feel areas where there is some flex in the floor as you walk upon it. As long it's a small amount it's no problem. It's just something you'll notice hear and there.

Laminate and engineered flooring will not be as cold as tile due to the pad underneath. It will not be as warm as carpet.

You can add more warmth and alter the feel of the room by placing area rugs in appropriate places.

Laminate and engineered flooring will completely fail if your basement floods. Even if only a small portion of the flooring is damaged, more than likely the entire laminate/engineered area will need to be redone. Materials become unavailable from manufacturer changes and new die lots won't exactly match.

I would not recommend installing any hardwood flooring for 2 reasons: (1) the humidity changes to much. And (2) you'll need to install some sort of subfloor to anchor the hardwood to.

Besides the additional subfloor expense, the thickness of the hardwood and subfloor may be enough to throw your gait off as you reach the floor from the bottom step. This distance from the bottom step to the floor becomes shorter and can be noticeably uncomfortable.

Lastly, if ceiling height is a consideration the thicker floor will bring you closer to the overhead soffits. It may be enough to make you self conscious about hitting your head

## Ceramic and Vinyl Tile

Ceramic and vinyl tile are the most durable choices for your floor. If water happens, no problem. Just mop up and you're done.

Ceramic and vinyl are more forgiving on wavy floors. Less or no leveling may be needed. Should a tile be damaged one can pull out the necessary tile and replace it.

I would never recommend installing a vinyl sheet good floor. If water happens to get underneath and raises the flooring it is impossible to make a seamless patch.

## Summary

Whatever floor style choices you make, very often some compromise is necessary. Weigh all your options according to what sort of durability and comfort you need that will fit your budget. And remember the worst can happen to best laid plans. See to it that you're covered with adequate insurance and those nightmares – if they happen, won't be so bad.