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Contractors who ignore the 'moisture rules' will find their luck has run out when they try to do an installation over UFH, warns Sid Bourne

Don't turn UP THE HEAT!

Why moisture is probably the leading cause of wood flooring callbacks.

I'm increasingly getting complaints about wood flooring situated over underfloor heating (UFH). The most common complaints, in no particular order, are to do with gaps, splits, delamination and cupping. I've written before about this issue before but am still getting more and more complaints.

Most complaints are unavoidable owing to the consumer just simply turning up the heat regardless of having been advised by the retailer or contractor of what not to do.

We have to remember flooring people aren't specialists in UFH and as such should limit their involvement and simply ask the consumer to seek information from the specialist UFH manufacturer which installed the system. There are many different types with different claims so why put yourself in that position?

Let's discuss what is it that makes UFH so intimidating and potentially trouble-prone: It can be summed up in one word: moisture. Even without UFH/radiant heat, moisture is probably the leading cause of wood flooring callbacks.

Add UFH, and the potential for moisture problems is greatly increased, because radiant heat dramatically exacerbates moisture fluctuations in a wood floor.

To understand that, it helps to know a little bit about how radiant heat systems work. The concept is familiar: the heat we feel from the sun or from a fireplace is radiant heat. Radiant energy travels through a space without heating the space itself (unlike a typical forced-air heating system, which actually warms the air).

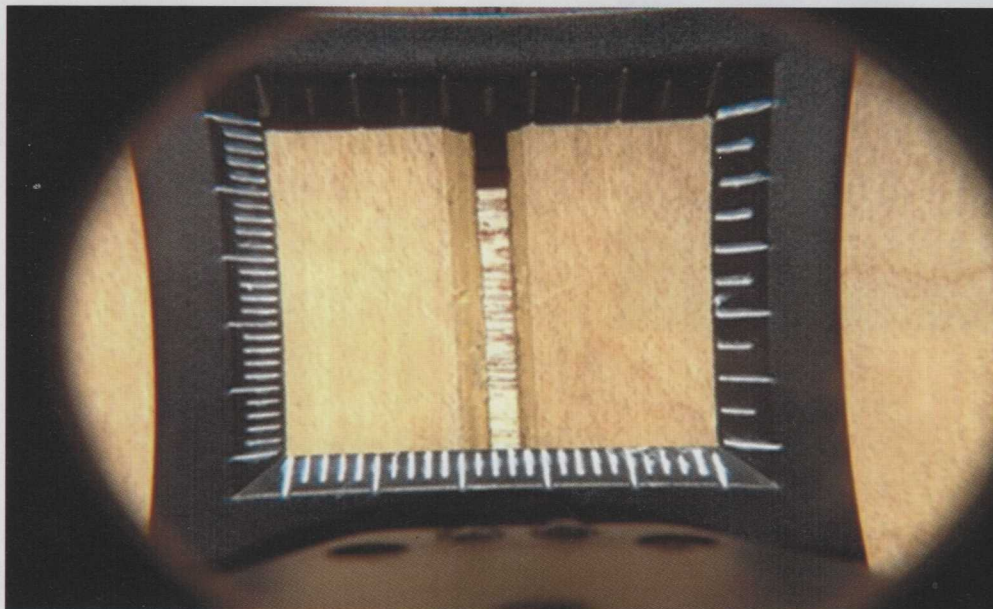
When radiant heat comes across a cooler surface, it attempts to equalise the temperature difference, giving off its heat.

A radiant heat system heats the materials around it, in the process drying everything else as well. It drives moisture from the joists, the slab, the subfloor - and the flooring.

Wood flooring contractors who typically get away with not playing by the moisture rules will find their luck has run out when they attempt to do an installation over UFH.

Just as important as what you do on the job site is what happens after you leave. Even the most stable product with the best installation, sanding and finishing job can have problems if the homeowners don't maintain the

I find most installers apply adhesive into the groove. Some apply plenty of adhesive while others just apply bits of adhesive. Because they get away with it on non-UFH subfloors they think it will work on UFH. Unfortunately, in many cases this doesn't work and causes the joint to breakdown owing to insufficient grab.



▲ This photo shows a typical joint that has broken down due to thermal movement and due to insufficient adhesive applied. The joint was completely void of any adhesive. Eventually I took the planks up and found part adhesive applied into grooves.

environment of the home.

Stabilising humidity, whether that means adding moisture in winter, dehumidifying in summer or whatever else, is critical to the success of the floor. And homeowners need to understand that even with humidity controls, it's natural for the floor to shrink and swell.

The problem I come across is the lack of technical knowledge with UFH, which leads to issues with gaps and, in the worse cases, delamination, and splits, which I have to say, are the most common issues.

As previously stated I don't believe it should be the responsibility of the contractor but the UFH company or both to get

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