

Summer Mail Bag

Andrew Pace: Welcome to the Non Toxic Environments podcast. My name is Andrew Pace. Every week cohost Jay Watts and I will discuss healthier home improvement, ideas and options. Thank you for finding us and please enjoy the show.

And we're back with Non Toxic Environments. Jay, we've got a good topic this week. Actually, it's the topic we've done several times and it keeps on coming up for us. We're dipping into the mailbag.

Jay Watts: Folks like to fill our mail bag up with good questions, we have really appreciate that and we encourage them to do it. So of course we, we need to respond to the mail. Let's get right into it. I have one here. This is a couple in Black Mountain, North Carolina, and they're asking- my husband and I are under contract for a home with new laminate flooring throughout. We are worried about the toxicity of the flooring and we would love to use a product to mitigate the off gassing. Is it possible to seal a laminate floor? And if so, which product or products do you recommend sealing the laminate floor away? I think we've discussed this one before and maybe other casts, but it's always good to bring these things back up again. Sometimes, people need to hear it repeated right. Well laminate floor and, there's a lot of laminate floors, so I'm just going to kind generize my response anyway. So laminate flooring comes with a finished factory applied finish. And when you're thinking about sealing a factory applied finish, there's a lot of challenges would you agree with that?

Andy: Well, not only a lot of, lot of challenges, but I think first and foremost, it's determining, is it truly a laminate floor? Or is it what's called an engineered floor?

Jay: There you go. There's the difference.

Andy: Yeah. And so there is a series of questions we ask, of course, it's a lot of times it's difficult for somebody buying a home to know what they actually have.

Jay: Most of the time. They don't know what they are, right?

Andy: The laminate floors that are being made these days look so good. They look like real wood, right. But a true laminate floor, we think of a Pergo floor. Pergo is probably the first large manufacturer that really got people interested in doing floating floors in their houses, right? Pergo it's a click and lock system. And the top surface is literally plastic laminate that is printed and even texturized to look like wood. This is a difficult product to seal because laminate plastic laminate is very, very tough to get anything to adhere to it properly.

Jay: That's the challenge. Exactly.

Andy: So if, if you want to try anything, it would be the AFM Hard Seal, and it would be applied in three very, very thin coats. Like to the point of pouring it in a bowl, take a sponge, dip it in the bowl, ring it out, and then just wipe on the finest of coats that you can put.

Jay: Now, you know, me being the conservative applicator that I am, I'm generally telling people and have told people that we've got a service we're going to, we need to do some preparation. And now in this situation, is it is their wisdom and actually de-glossing the surface before you apply the Hard Seal, I would say yes... no?

Andy: I would say no. And the reason for that is it's a plastic surface. It's not a wood surface. And with plastic surfaces, when you start to de-gloss the surface, you may actually take off the ink.

Jay: Oh yeah. Okay. Well that would not work. But then I'm concerned about the sealer, whether it's my sealer Hard Seal or some from another company, are we going to get it to lay down? Are we going to have separation and beading up that that would be my concern if we're not profiling.

Andy: Right. And so testing, it's a very similar to sealing up a vinyl floor. What we would ask them to do is to wash the floor thoroughly. Use the AFM Super Clean because the cleaner and degreaser is not going to leave any residue when it dries important. Very important. So wash thoroughly, rinse, let dry, and then in a small inconspicuous area, maybe in a closet, test to see if the Hard Seal adheres properly. And the test for that is to wipe on a thin coat, let it dry for a few hours, wipe on a second coat, let it dry overnight, and then scratch it with your thumbnail. I'm not asking you to use anything really sharp because let's face it- that's not the way the floor will be used. So you can scrape any floor with a sharp implement and you're going to scratch it, but with the thumbnail you're kind of mimicking what will happen with regular wear. Now, if it scratches, I'm not necessarily as concerned if it peels right off like a sheet of dead skin, that's

the problem. So that would be my test on that. Now if it's an engineered floor, different story, similar techniques and testing, of course, but it was an engineered floor. That means that it actually has a layer of real wood on the surface. That's then finished typically with a factory applied polyurethane. With that, now what you're talking about with profiling, now you have to do that because the clear coat that's on there is really kind of a sacrificial code. And so you've got a lightly sand or what's called buffing the surface, and then you would apply the AFM Polyureseal BP, because it's like you're finishing a refinishing, the hardwood floor.

Jay: Yeah. And I think, and I think it's important point here, folks that are listening, getting samples to be able to do these little experiments is really the way to go. AFM has a sampling program. And if you're in a situation where you're kind of wondering which direction to take, you should always try to get samples from whoever's supplying products to you. So just a word to the wise.

Andy: Very good point. Very good point. So I guess what it comes down to is if you know the floor that you're going onto you can kind of plan for that. If you don't know what exactly it is, if you're just using terminology, because that's what maybe the realtor used, you got to do a little more digging and hopefully then there will be a way to seal it, to provide some relief.

Jay: Okay. Good answer. What do you got, Andy? That's awesome.

Andy: Well, this is a kind of an involved question and we get questions like this.

Jay: We love the involved ones.

Andy: We get questions like this quite often. So I thought I would address it here. The note says we have a daughter that has many special medical problems and we are having a modular home built being built. Okay. She is very sensitive to electromagnetic fields, dirty electricity, et cetera. She is missing a gene which prevents her from detoxifying things properly. She works with a specific health institutes in her home state and they recommended that they give us a call here. We have seen your website with the various consultation options, and we are trying to decide which one is best for us. Our thought is to have our contractor contact you, to discuss suitable building products for the home. The contractor also suggested that you or us and her and the builder should have a conference call to discuss the options. Could you please advise us on which option would be the most economical and appropriate for the situation we know that you on building materials, can you also advise on appliances furniture and so forth? Thank you very much -Dale and Dante.

Jay: Wow. That's the whole shebang there isn't it.

Andy: Boy, I'll tell you, this is all too often the types of emails that we get and it's happening more. I don't know if there's more instances of sensitivity or it's just that people are becoming more empowered to actually talk about it.

Jay: I think it's probably a little of both. The first thing that came my ears picked up when they said modular home.

Andy: Yes.

Jay: So when you hear the word modular, all kinds of different bells and whistles go off, don't they?

Andy: Yes. And so first off I wanted to talk about the different types of consulting that we do. Jay I know you've also dipped your toe into the world of consulting, and I appreciate that. I think everybody will appreciate that. When you go to our website, you can actually book a consultation with Jay and Jay and talk to you about his personal experiences, has his business experience and helping folks all around the world live in their homes in a healthier manner. My background is architecture, commercial, construction, residential construction. While I don't have the pedigree that some have with being a true architect, or being a true home builder, I have the unique experience of being able to work independently with all of them and where that helps is I'm never taking anyone's side except for my client, right? And in this situation and all situations, the most important issue is making sure that the home being built, be it a stick frame home, or a modular home, is safe for their daughter. And speaking, being able to speak the language of the architect, being able to speak the language of the contractors, helps greatly. And I think the biggest thing is the experience Jay, both you and I have of helping folks for 25 plus years each of us, we know what contractors are trying to get at, trying to do, we understand how things are phrased the terminology of certain installations and applications. And we can help folks walk through that. Now what I do from a consulting side, Jay, and for everybody listening, is I'll actually do anywhere from 15 minute consultations all the way up to project consultations where I'm actually helping people out through the design stage, bidding stage, and then construction. It's a little more involved than what Jay does. Jay's really there for answering those questions of I'm in a project- what do I do?

Jay: Many times it's coating focused. So we're trying to mitigate a problem where we have an off gassing problem and there's a solution from the AFM side that can help manage the off gassing problem or someone, and I'm always hoping that I'm at the front end of a discussion as opposed to coming in later but, it's always nice when someone's come and they're getting ready to do a job. There's wanting to start the right way, which is use the safest product possible. We always talk about source, using the best possible sources as opposed to trying to figure out how to fix something that we got surprised by.

Andy: I think to answer their question with a little bit more detail, what can I help with? Electromagnetic fields or electricity and so forth, there are people out there who specifically work in that realm. I like to say I'm fairly well rounded and well versed in that and become more so on a daily basis. That's not my main main drive. My main focus. My main focus would be the material chemistry, off gassing, choosing the right materials, helping to make that the goal of what needs to be done first, what takes more importance than other applications, regarding EMF and so forth. Sure. Those are things we certainly can talk about. The idea of advising on appliances with the lowest electromagnetic fields and furniture. Yes, definitely. These are things I can talk about. Matter of fact, I'm really happy to talk about some new equipment that I've been able to get. That'll allow me to do some independent testing of things like appliances, and other electronics to really determine how good or bad they are for our own personal health.

Jay: Yeah. I think the big advantage there is your ability to kind of get above the aerial view as it were, looking at the entire project and being able to say, okay, this is our priorities. This is how working with the client, understanding the client's needs, coming back and saying, okay, as

I see it, this is how we're going to stir this pot. Here's how we're going to set this up. We're going to deal with this and this and this and this, and there's going to be a trajectory throughout the process. You're there to be able to oversee it as it were as the project proceeds and take action where it's necessary to make sure that things stay on track.

Andy: Exactly right. I think of clients that I have right now that are going through the process of just bidding their home. You know, it's been designed, the contractor that they're working with has been very receptive to providing multiple prices for different materials to make sure that it's something that they can fit in their budget. And now that we have all the numbers, we're trying to shake the dust a little bit, and figure out now where can we save some dollars? Where can we focus other resources to? We have to create the priority lists when building a home or remodeling, not only what is most important to address, but what's the best use of resources.

Jay: That's always a fundamental question. And it's one that kind of could get complicated and kind of spin out unless someone's shepherding it. I want to back up just a bit, Andy, because I really the fact that they're doing modular, it's kind of a whole other game, right. Because you've got the manufacturing of the modular home and they have protocols and practices that they do every day. And so it's a little bit different than a new build or a remodel, a major remodel because it's there, whereas this is being done by somebody and coming out to the job site. So how do you think about that in terms of your consulting in a situation like that? I mean, what would be the first thing you'd say to a client, these people right here, you're going to have a first meeting they've decided to hire you as a consultant. What would you lay out for them on that first meeting? In terms of the idea of a modular home, I mean, we don't want to scare him. Modular, why in the hell did you do that?

Andy: Right? Well, here's the best thing I can say is when you're working on a modular home; modular home takes out of the equation a lot of unknowns, the fact that it's being built in a factory and then brought to the job site and put together is a relief for many reasons. And I think I talked about this in the last couple of episodes, customers who are building and they're running into situations where the wood is getting soaked because of rain. And now they've got mold growing on all the exposed woods and wood in the home. Well, when you're doing a modular home, that pretty much is nonexistent. So we can take advantage of that. We can take advantage of the speed in which the home gets not only erected, but dried in, and now we can start working on other things. The best thing I can advise, at least without knowing enough about the project right now is if there are modular home builders in your area that have a lot of experience and good testimonials, meets all those requirements already, but they're in your area and they can service your area without question then I would most definitely think about that way to go, because it's my view that in the next 10 to 15 years, a great deal of home construction across the country will start to switch over to modular homes.

Jay: Yes, yes. I agree.

Andy: It's just getting to be too expensive to build homes on site because of fluctuating material costs, lack of available labor, skilled labor. That consistency there. And then the consistency of weather; we are a society now that is run by computers and by schedules, but yet home construction is totally at the whim of mother nature and whether or not the trades will show up certain days because they have 32 other projects to work on.

Jay: Right. Complications. I was thinking off, you know, thinking about, uh, you know, the, the materials that are used in a modular home and how there's some challenges in terms of being able to figure out what can I tolerate? What can I tolerate? Is there a possibility for substitution? Can I catch them and say, listen, I don't want you to use that coating. I'd rather use this coating. There would be a situation where having an overseer like you to say, to interface with the modular firm at the very beginning and say, Hey, listen, they they've picked model B. Right. And model B comes with these things. And one of the things they do is we do this and you can say, well, our client is concerned about the potential off gassing of materials. What kind of dialogue can we have about that? Just something that's coming into my mind, just because that's what AFM does, we deal with sealers. So I'm thinking, can there be substitutions made or is that not going to work because A) it's going to cost too much? And B) it's just not logistically possible. There's all these questions that surface.

Andy: My experience with my modular home so far has been very good. Very few of them are so rigid in their design and methods that they will just not entertain any changes. And so we're pretty confident that we can work with most modular home builders, and that they will allow us to make enough adjustments to the project that it will make it a healthy, livable space, which is number one priority, of course. So I hope that helps not only the folks that reached out on that email, but others that reach out and ask about consultations on new homes, modular homes, remodeling, and so forth, how we can all help and make sure that the process goes smoothly and healthily. So Jay, I've got one more for us, and this actually ties into what I talked about last week, and we've talked a little bit about in other shows, but I specifically didn't mention this particular material. Jackie asks us- I've been looking for a clean product to seal my marble hexagon tiles for a back splash in my kitchen. Is there a product that you make that I can use

to protect it while cooking on my stove and be safe for my family? And if you do, how often should it be reapplied? Thanks for your time. So I talked about a number of surfaces last week in waterproofing oil protection, salt protection. And I know we've talked about sealers. We've talked about granite, we've talked about natural stone, never actually specifically mentioned marble.

Jay: I don't think we did.

Andy: And so marble is used in three areas that I know of- countertops backsplash, and then marble tiles specifically like in a bathroom or a shower situation. Marble is an interesting material in that it's fairly porous and you can get it in a natural dull state, a polished state, or you can get a porcelain tile that looks exactly like the real thing. And that comes in either a dull finish or a shiny finish, and you never have to do anything to it. So that's what I like to do. But, in situations where marble is there, and this is what you have, this is what you have to seal it. You've got to think of the fact that you have to understand or are determined before you buy your sealer- is this a marble material that is a dull or tumbled product? Or does it already have a polish to it? This will determine the direction that you'll need to go. The second thing that will determine that is what are you trying to achieve? What do you want the finished product to look like? You know, that old question we always ask, what are we trying to seal in or seal out? In a backsplash there's a concern about what's the worst that can happen? You're cooking spaghetti sauce on the stove and it starts to boil it pops and that red spaghetti sauce flies everywhere and marble stains really easy. So you need to put on a sealer, a coating really, that will not allow any penetration whatsoever of anything into the surface. So you can't use a sub surface sealer like we talked about last week, you've got to use something like the AFM Mexeseal, because it actually puts a coating, a film over the surface. And when that spaghetti

sauce flies in the air and hits that film, it can be wiped off before it actually soaks in. Now, if the tile is tumbled and it's a dull finish, then you can apply either a gloss coat, or a matte finish or satin finish and I think it'll look just fine. It all comes down to personal preference. If it's a polished marble, you've got to do some testing to make sure that the Mexeseal will properly adhere to it because of it's really highly polished, it's like trying to stick a paint to a sheet of glass it's just to grab onto.

Jay: Not only that, when it floats like that, tends to not disperse the solids correctly. And it gets real milky. I've seen that happen. I actually did a little experiment on some polished marble and that's exactly what it was. And of course, what that looks like is it looks white and it looks streaky. It kind of accentuates the tooling marks that come across. So yeah, you really have to be careful there and do your exploration with your samples, right?

Andy: I guess the easy question is, the AFM Mexeseal would be your best bet in that situation. However, as we talk about all the time, make sure you do a small sample, maybe a cutoff piece of your marble, just to see how it's going to look before doing the entire area. Because once it's on there, folks, it's going to be really difficult to get off.

Jay: Well, I think we did a fairly good job in a bag today.

Andy: I think so. I think so. It's always fun to do these mailbags segments.

Jay: Yeah, yeah, yeah, indeed. And I know that people are going to think, Hmm, what mail can I send these guys? Let's see if we can throw them a curve ball.

Andy: Bring us your best.

Jay: Give us, give us the hard ones we love it.

Andy: Exactly. And folks, we'll be back again next week with another episode of Non Toxic Environments. Get out there and enjoy the wonderful summer weather we're finally getting. Hope that means a lot of vitamin D and that means that we're all getting healthier these days. Thanks again for joining us, please go to iTunes, give us a rating and a review. We greatly appreciate it. Tell your friends that this is still the number one healthy building, healthy home show on the iTunes platform. Jay, we'll talk to you again next week.

Jay: Sounds good, Andy. Bye.

Andy: Bye. Bye