

FACTS ABOUT

Flooring Made with Composite Wood Products**What is the Composite Wood Products Regulation?**

The Composite Wood Products Regulation is a California Air Resources Board (CARB) regulation that reduces public exposure to formaldehyde through the establishment of strict emission performance standards on particleboard, medium density fiberboard and hardwood plywood (collectively known as composite wood products). The regulation, adopted in 2007, established two phases of emissions standards: an initial Phase I, and later, a more stringent Phase 2 that requires all finished goods, such as flooring, destined for sale or use in California to be made using complying composite wood products. As of January, 2014 only Phase 2 products are legal for sale in California.

**What does the Composite Wood Products Regulation require for flooring products?**

Any composite wood products contained in flooring products – generally the underlying platform to which the laminate or wood veneer is affixed – are required to be certified as complying with California’s formaldehyde emission standards. The companies that make flooring are required to label their flooring or their boxes of flooring as having been made with certified compliant composite wood products, to keep records to verify that they have purchased compliant products, and to inform distributors and retailers that their flooring is compliant with California’s current requirements (referred to as CARB Phase 2).

Are flooring manufacturers required to be certified?

No. Manufacturers of flooring are not required to be certified, but they are required to make their flooring using certified compliant composite wood products.

How can I tell if my flooring is safe to use?

The Composite Wood Products Regulation establishes emission standards at levels intended to protect public health. We believe most laminate flooring and engineered wood flooring labeled as complying with California’s formaldehyde emission standards (i.e., CARB Phase 2) meets those standards. However some flooring products may have been falsely labeled.

Various studies have shown that laminated and engineered flooring and sealed surfaces and edges reduce the emissions from the platform materials and that the emissions generally decrease as the product ages. As a general rule, we do not recommend removing a flooring product unless there are noticeable health effects (i.e. nose and throat irritation, a burning sensation of the eyes, wheezing, and difficulty in breathing), and other measures (see below) taken to alleviate them have failed and there is good reason to believe the flooring is the source of the problem.

If I don’t trust the label, or I am from another state and there is no label, what can I do to minimize potential exposures to formaldehyde?

There are several steps that can be taken to alleviate emissions from indoor air pollutants such as formaldehyde. Proper ventilation, such as opening up windows, bringing fresh air through a central ventilation system, and running exhaust fans will expedite formaldehyde off-gassing from finished goods in your home as well as the odors from any finishes such as varnish or lacquer. Extended ventilation may be needed. Keeping indoor temperatures and humidity low, such as by using an air conditioner and/or dehumidifier to draw the moisture out of the air when humid, may help decrease the amount of formaldehyde that off-gasses into the indoor air. You may also leave your new product(s) in the garage or under a covered carport for a while to let it off-gas before bringing it inside the house. Panel products, flooring products and other finished goods that are covered with impermeable facing such as synthetic laminates may further reduce emissions.

For more information please refer to the following documents:

- CARB Consumer Factsheet: www.arb.ca.gov/toxics/compwood/consumer_faq.pdf
- The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Update on Formaldehyde: www.cpsc.gov/PageFiles/121919/AN%20UPDATE%20ON%20FORMALDEHYDE%20final%200113.pdf

What can I do if I want to test formaldehyde levels in my home?

A homeowner can use home indoor air test kits to test the indoor air formaldehyde concentrations. However, there are a wide variety of sources of formaldehyde in indoor air such as combustion emissions from natural gas appliances, new carpet, some consumer products, and other new furniture or cabinets. So, indoor air testing will not necessarily indicate whether the flooring is emitting elevated levels of formaldehyde. It is possible to have flooring properly tested for formaldehyde emissions, but these tests are difficult and expensive.

What is CARB doing to ensure manufacturers are complying with the regulation?

CARB staff conducts inspections where composite wood products and finished goods are sold to the public in California. We check for proper labels, invoices or bills of lading, and may purchase composite wood panels or finished goods for further testing to ensure compliance with the emission standards. CARB has several investigations pending that include all aspects of the composite wood industry, including finished products. Any resulting enforcement actions will be made public upon the successful resolution of each case.

Where can I find more information on the California regulation?

For additional information on this regulation and current activity, please visit www.arb.ca.gov/toxics/compwood/compwood.htm

To obtain this document in an alternative format or language please contact the ARB's Helpline at (800) 242-4450 or at helpline@arb.ca.gov. TTY/TDD/Speech to Speech users may dial 711 for the California Relay Service.