

Environmental Considerations Guide

Sustainable Choices for Healthier Homes and Planet

Making environmentally conscious flooring decisions benefits both your family's health and the planet. This guide covers sustainable materials, certifications, and indoor air quality.

Sustainable Wood Sources

FSC Certification: Gold standard for responsible forestry - ensures replanting, biodiversity protection, and chain of custody tracking. Look for FSC-C or FSC 100% labels.

PEFC Certification: Covers smaller forests, strong in Europe, comparable sustainability standards.

Local Species: UK/European oak, ash, beech offer lower transport emissions and easier verification.

Renewable Alternatives: Bamboo and cork harvest in 3-7 years vs decades for hardwood.

Reclaimed Wood Benefits

Environmental Impact:

- Zero deforestation
- Diverts waste from landfill
- 90% lower impact than new wood
- Embodied carbon already absorbed

Quality Advantages:

- Old-growth timber with tighter grain
- Natural patina and unique character
- Often harder than modern wood

Sourcing Tips: Verify legitimacy, check for contamination, ensure proper drying, request provenance.

Indoor Air Quality

VOC Emissions

Standards:

- Water-based finishes: Under 250g/L
- Oil-based: Under 450g/L
- Zero-VOC: Under 5g/L

Health Impact: VOCs cause headaches and respiratory issues, strongest in first 6 months.

Best Low-VOC Options: Natural oils, water-based polyurethane, hard-wax oils, natural waxes

Adhesives

Avoid: Solvent-based, formaldehyde products **Choose:** Water-based, mechanical fixing, floating installations

Environmental Certifications

Product Certifications:

- **FloorScore®:** Tests indoor emissions
- **GreenGuard Gold:** Strictest emission limits
- **EU Ecolabel:** Covers entire lifecycle

Building Standards:

- BREEAM points for sustainable materials
- LEED credits for FSC and low-VOC
- WELL Standard for occupant health

Lifecycle Considerations

Durability: Quality floors last 100+ years with restoration vs 20-30 for alternatives

Maintenance: Use natural oils, avoid harsh chemicals, choose repairable finishes

End of Life: Prioritise reclaim and reuse, bioenergy recovery, or composting untreated wood

Making Sustainable Choices

Priority Order

1. Reclaimed wood (lowest impact)
2. FSC-certified local species
3. Rapidly renewable (bamboo/cork)
4. PEFC-certified
5. Verified legal source (minimum)

Key Questions for Suppliers

- What certifications does this have?
- Where was it harvested?
- What's the VOC content?
- Can you provide chain of custody?

Budget Notes

- 10-20% initial premium typical
- Lower long-term health costs
- Higher property values
- Extended lifespan offsets cost

The Bottom Line

Sustainable flooring protects forests and improves indoor air quality while often providing superior long-term value. Prioritise reclaimed or certified wood, choose low-VOC finishes, and consider lifecycle impacts. Small investments in sustainability yield significant health and environmental benefits. Always request certification documentation from suppliers.