



# SOUTHBOROUGH FIRE DEPARTMENT

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### RE: **New Floor Finishing Regulations Take Effect June 1**

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan and Fire Chief John D. Mauro, Jr. want to alert the public that starting June 1, 2010 when using certain flammable liquids to finish wood floors, the fire department must be notified and in buildings with more than four units, a permit must be obtained first.

Chief Mauro said, "Over the past several years there have been several tragic fires stemming from the many fire hazards that the floor finishing process poses. Chief Mauro said, "Newly revised regulations now address the many different fire hazards of floor finishing – improper electrical hook-ups, the storage of waste materials, and dust explosion hazards, as well as the application of flammable liquids."

These regulations were put in place in response to a series of tragic accidents associated with floor finishing. In September 2004, a Somerville explosion and fire in a triple-decker caused the deaths of two workers, injured two workers and four firefighters. It is believed that vapors from the flammable liquids were ignited by the pilot light on the gas water heater. In July 2005, a 43-year old man was part of a floor sanding crew that was refinishing the hardwood floors in a Hull single-family home. Once again, fumes from the sealant came in contact with the pilot of the gas water heater causing an explosion and the ensuing fire.

### **Highlights of the New Regulation**

#### **Permit and Notice to Fire Department Required**

The previous regulations applied only to bowling alleys, but have been amended to address the fire hazards of wood floor sanding, finishing or refinishing in all occupancies. Starting June 1, 2010, a fire department permit will be required when certain flammable liquids are going to be used in floor finishing in buildings with more than four units. In buildings with four or fewer units, the fire department must be notified prior to the start of work.

#### **Preventing Flammable Liquid Fires**

The regulations require the removal of ignition sources such as pilot lights prior to the application of finishing products considered flammable liquids until the product has dried. It also prohibits using flammable liquids when direct ventilation of the space to the outside is not possible. The new regulation also requires posting warning signs in

buildings with more than one dwelling unit when flammable liquids are used in floor finishing.

### **Preventing Electrical Fires**

It reinforces the fact that the Massachusetts Electrical Code requires an electrical wiring permit when connecting equipment directly to an electrical panel. Some floor refinishing equipment use larger amounts of electricity than home outlets typically provide, so the equipment is often connected directly to the electrical panel in violation of the code. This poses a fire risk and bypasses the normal circuit protection in electrical systems.

### **Preventing Fires From Dust and Rags**

The regulations also address the safe storage of flammable and combustible products and waste materials. There have been many fires started by the spontaneous combustion of the dust from floor sanding put into airtight bags and from rags soaked in combustible and flammable liquids. Some floor finishing products such as linseed oil are considered combustible but not flammable. Rags soaked in combustible chemicals still pose a serious fire risk if not properly handled. The regulations require use of a metal waste can with a self-closing cover for all waste products including wood dust and rags. The can must be removed from the building daily and the materials disposed of properly.

On February 9, 2010, an historic octagonal house in Holyoke was severely damaged when a barrel full of sawdust from wooden floor refinishing ignited.

### **Consider Less Dangerous Alternatives**

Use of water-based or non-flammable floor refinishing products does not require notification to or a permit from the fire department. Whether homeowners are doing the work themselves or hiring a contractor, it is important to consider the fire safety aspects of the materials being used. Cheaper products or services and faster drying time associated with flammable finishes can cost more in the long run if there is an explosion or fire.