

Job-Site Protection

Products and methods to keep your clients' stuff clean and safe

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There's a very important reason to do a great job with dust control, cleanup, and surface protection during a remodel: our clients. Dust, mess, and damage to their homes makes them crazy, and they judge us for failures. Proper protection is also less expensive and much faster than repairing stuff we weren't there to fix. No contractor wants to sand floors two weeks after a project has finished. Over the years, we've made enough mistakes that by now we have a good set of techniques and materials for protecting our clients' homes and belongings when we're remodeling.

The list of tricks and products is always evolving. When we present this information at trade shows, we always learn something new we can use. This article can't possibly cover all of the scenarios, so visit FineHomebuilding.com/magazine to see some additional techniques and a menu of our favorite products for protecting almost anything you'll come across on a residential site. □

Doug Horgan and Tom Johnston work for BOWA, a design firm in McLean and Middleburg, Va. Photos by Patrick McCombe.

COVERING ASSETS

Our clients are often living in the homes we're remodeling, so we have to protect and show respect for their possessions. Before a job starts, the project manager walks the entire area affected by the proposed construction and identifies all the objects to be left in the space and those that must be removed. We also identify what trim or other building materials are to be saved and which are to be donated or disposed of. Different colors of tape or spray paint identify different categories.



FURNITURE

We cover the furniture in spaces adjacent to the construction zone with draped 3-mil poly. The temporary wall in the background separates a wall of patio doors destined for replacement from the rest of the living room.

Control access. The first step to protecting a client's home and belongings is preventing someone from just walking onto the job site and stealing from the home or pilfering materials outside. We make visitors check in with the project manager and we train our subs to introduce new workers to the project manager as well.



ART

Clients will remove furniture and decorative objects from work areas, but we have to protect pieces in adjacent spaces too. We cover artwork and wallpaper with 3-mil poly secured with painter's tape. Don't apply tape directly to art, wallpaper, or any other surface that's impossible or difficult to repair.



CLOSETS

Belongings can often be left in closets, if the space is fully closed off with taped 4-mil poly. We use two layers of tape on most surfaces—we put a layer of painter's tape on the wall or painted surface, and then we tape the poly to that tape with duct tape.



HVAC

Cover return-air grilles with washable fibrous furnace filters to prevent dust from being blown through the house and clogging HVAC equipment. Use high-flow economy filters and clean them often to ensure HVAC equipment has enough airflow.

PROTECTING SURFACES

We shield floors and flat surfaces from foot traffic, dropped tools, spilled paint (or coffee), and a host of other hazards with improvised materials and specialty protection products. We tape edges and seams to prevent dirt and liquid from getting in. Avoid taping to expensive surfaces like faux finishing or wallpaper.



ENTRANCES

Protecting the path to the primary entrance with sheets of OSB or plywood prevents foot traffic and debris from damaging porch floors, stair treads, decks, and hardscaping.



FLOORING

Hardwood flooring is first covered with Econo Runner, a felt material with a very light adhesive. On top is Masonite (hardboard) for maximum protection, or Ram Board (rolled cardboard), which is less expensive and easier to clean, but not as tough. We tape all seams with Ram Board Seam Tape.

Reuse carpet.

Salvaged carpet is great for protecting floors and other surfaces. It traps dirt and it's free. Here it protects a stone mosaic while other tile work in this master bath continues.



STAIRS

We use Econo Runner on wood stairs. For carpeted stairs, Protective Products sells a backward-rolled version of their Carpet Protection that makes it easier to cover the risers. For long-term jobs, we make tread covers of plywood or hardboard. Foam sill sealer or old carpeting (soft side facing in) protects railings.





Condo considerations

Condominium and apartment complexes come with the added hassle of having to protect common areas in addition to the owner's space. If we damage something, we're on the hook for repairs. Most buildings we work in require us to remove the protective materials every Friday so they're gone over the weekend. A few buildings want us to pull them up every day.

DOOR JAMBS

It's critical to protect the door jambs on condo and apartment front doors. They're considered part of the common space and repairs are expensive and difficult because any new materials must blend in seamlessly with all of the other units' doors and jambs.



THRESHOLDS

Sticky walk-off mats keep any construction dirt inside the unit from being tracked throughout the hallways. We recently started buying ones that feature our logo. It lets neighbors know who's doing the work and shows that we care about our clients and the space where we're working.



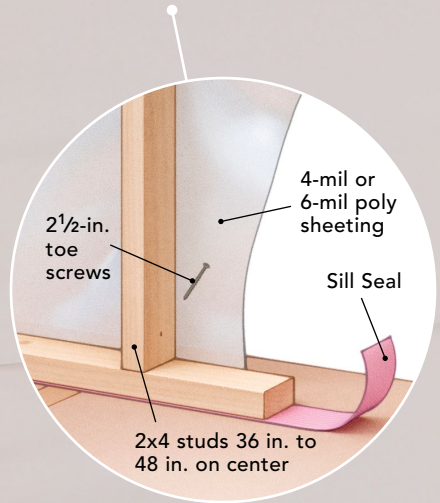
COMMON AREAS

We've used miles of Protective Products Carpet Protection. It's easy to apply, creates a safe walking surface without a trip hazard, and protects better than drop cloths. Plus, it can be cleaned with a vacuum or wet cloth. This product is so good that many of the condominium buildings we work in require it as part of their standard renovation protocol.





Strips of cardboard floor protection under hand-driven T50 staples.



LONG-TERM WALLS

For long-term projects, we build temporary walls from 2x4 studs spaced 3 ft. to 4 ft. on center and covered with poly sheeting to separate construction areas from the rest of the house. Foam sill sealer on the top and bottom plates protects the ceiling and floor from damage. Every stud is individually fit so it compresses the sill sealer, and if we expect wind pressure we put some screws through the top plate into the ceiling joists.



ZIPPER DOORS

Self-adhesive ZipWall zippers allow access to containment areas while keeping in dust. For areas that require regular access, we install a weatherstripped interior door.

CONTROLLING DUST

When we ask prospective clients about their concerns with the remodeling process, dust often tops the list. It's comparatively easy to protect surfaces and furnishings from physical damage, but dust goes everywhere. Whenever possible we use enclosures placed under negative air pressure to prevent dust from traveling outside the construction zone.



Close the openings. A piece of foam insulation reinforces poly sheeting to resist the pressure created by wind or a floor sander's fan. XPS works fine, but tape sticks better to foil-faced polyiso. We use painter's tape for short-term (up to two weeks) adhesion to walls and trim. We use 3M No-Residue tape for longer projects, and for adhering to sturdy surfaces like metal or trim with semigloss paint.



Duct tape on top of painter's tape holds the plastic better than painter's tape alone. Don't use duct tape alone; it pulls off paint.



SHORT-TERM WALLS

Install a furnace filter to equalize air pressure when the wall is subject to wind.

Taping plastic directly to the ceiling and walls without a temporary wall or support poles works for a day or two, but it won't hold in windy conditions. For shorter projects and on stairs we use spring-loaded poles designed to hold plastic to the ceiling. Fancy versions hold the plastic to the walls too, but we generally tape the plastic on the sides instead—and even across the ceiling to help with wind.



NEGATIVE PRESSURE

A technique developed for hazardous work like asbestos and lead remediation, blowing air out of the workspace so it's under negative pressure prevents dust from migrating into other areas of the home. If we keep windows and doors closed, a typical window or box fan can keep one or two rooms under enough negative pressure to control dust. A cardboard or foam shroud around the fan to keep it tight in the opening will boost efficiency. For larger spaces, use a variable-speed floor dryer.