

NEW BRUNSWICK FLOORING

Subfloor & Preparation

Subfloor repair, levelling, moisture barriers, plywood overlay, and preparation techniques for NB flooring projects

19 Expert Answers from Floor IQ

newbrunswickflooring.com/construction-brain

Table of Contents

1. What thickness of plywood subfloor is required under ceramic tile in a second-floor NB bathroom?
2. How much does it cost to add rigid foam insulation under a basement subfloor system in New Brunswick?
3. What are the signs that subfloor water damage has spread to the floor joists in a NB home?
4. What subfloor ventilation is needed under a raised floor system in a damp NB crawl space?
5. How do I insulate a subfloor over an unheated crawl space to prevent cold floors in a Bathurst winter?
6. How do I fix squeaky subfloors before installing new carpet in my NB home?
7. What type of subfloor preparation is needed for tile installation in NB?
8. How do I level an uneven concrete basement floor before installing flooring in NB?
9. Do I need to replace my plywood subfloor before new hardwood in my older NB home?
10. What moisture barrier should I use on a concrete slab in my NB basement?
11. How do I test concrete moisture levels before flooring installation in New Brunswick?
12. What is the cost of subfloor repair in a New Brunswick home?
13. Can I install new flooring over old board subfloors in a pre-1970s NB home?
14. How flat does a subfloor need to be for LVP installation in NB?
15. What causes soft spots in subfloors of older New Brunswick homes?
16. Do I need underlayment for every type of flooring in my NB home?
17. How do I deal with moisture coming through my NB basement concrete slab?
18. What is self-levelling compound and when do I need it for NB flooring?
19. Should I remove old vinyl before installing new flooring or can I go over it in NB?

What thickness of plywood subfloor is required under ceramic tile in a second-floor NB bathroom?

For a second-floor bathroom in New Brunswick, you need a minimum 1-1/8 inch (28mm) combined subfloor thickness under ceramic tile, typically achieved with 3/4 inch plywood subfloor plus 1/2 inch cement board backer.

The structural requirements for tile installation are more demanding than other flooring types because ceramic and porcelain tiles are rigid and will crack if the subfloor deflects under load. In NB's older housing stock, many second-floor bathrooms have 5/8 inch or 3/4 inch plywood over 2x8 or 2x10 joists spaced 16 inches on center. While this meets building code for general flooring, it's often insufficient for tile without additional reinforcement.

Proper subfloor assembly for NB bathroom tile starts with assessing your existing structure. If you have 3/4 inch plywood in good condition over adequately sized joists (2x10 minimum for 16-inch spacing), you can install 1/2 inch cement board directly over it using appropriate screws. This creates the 1-1/4 inch total thickness that provides adequate stiffness. However, if your existing subfloor is thinner or shows any flex when you walk on it, add a second layer of 1/2 inch plywood with construction adhesive and screws, staggering the seams from the original layer.

Moisture protection is critical in NB bathrooms due to our Maritime humidity levels. Before installing cement board, apply a waterproof membrane (like RedGard or Kerdi) over the plywood, paying special attention to corners, penetrations, and the tub/shower area. The cement board goes over this membrane, then gets its own waterproofing treatment before tile installation. This redundant moisture protection prevents the subfloor rot that's common in older NB homes where bathroom moisture has penetrated inadequate vapor barriers.

Deflection testing is essential before committing to tile. Walk across your proposed tile area and feel for any bounce or movement. Place a 4-foot level across the floor and look for gaps that indicate dips or humps exceeding 1/8 inch over 3 feet. Tile installations fail when the subfloor moves, creating stress cracks in grout lines and eventually cracked tiles. If you detect any flex, add blocking between joists or install additional plywood layers until the floor feels rock-solid.

When to hire a professional: Subfloor assessment and reinforcement requires construction knowledge beyond surface-level flooring skills. If your bathroom shows signs of previous moisture damage, has undersized joists, or needs structural modifications to achieve proper stiffness, consult a contractor experienced with NB's older housing stock before proceeding with tile installation.

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Q2

How much does it cost to add rigid foam insulation under a basement subfloor system in New Brunswick?

Adding rigid foam insulation under a basement subfloor system in New Brunswick typically costs \$3-\$8 per square foot installed, depending on insulation thickness, access conditions, and whether you're building a new subfloor system or retrofitting an existing one.

This type of insulation upgrade makes excellent sense in New Brunswick's climate. Our long heating season (October through April) means basement floors stay uncomfortably cold without proper thermal separation from the concrete slab. Rigid foam insulation creates a warm, dry foundation for any finished flooring while preventing condensation issues that plague many NB basements.

Material costs for rigid foam insulation run \$1.50-\$4.00 per square foot depending on thickness and type. Two-inch polyisocyanurate (polyiso) or extruded polystyrene (XPS) boards provide excellent R-value (R-10 to R-13) and moisture resistance. These materials resist the persistent humidity that affects NB basements year-round. One-inch boards cost less but provide only half the thermal performance — not ideal for our climate.

Installation complexity drives the wide cost range. If you're building a new subfloor system over concrete, the process is straightforward: lay rigid foam boards directly on the slab, seal joints with tape or spray foam, then build your subfloor frame on top. This runs \$3-\$5 per square foot installed. However, retrofitting insulation under an existing subfloor requires removing the current flooring, potentially cutting access holes, and working in cramped conditions — pushing costs to \$6-\$8 per square foot.

New Brunswick's moisture conditions make proper installation critical. Maritime humidity keeps basement concrete slabs continuously damp, and spring snowmelt (April through June) temporarily increases moisture vapor

transmission through the slab. The rigid foam must include a vapor barrier facing the concrete, and all seams need sealing to prevent humid air from reaching the subfloor assembly above. Skipping these moisture management steps leads to condensation, mold, and rot within 2-3 years.

For a typical 600 square foot basement, expect total costs of \$1,800-\$4,800 depending on access and complexity. This investment pays back through reduced heating costs and creates a foundation for comfortable finished flooring. The insulation also eliminates the cold floor problem that makes basement spaces unusable during NB's long winter months.

When to hire a professional: This work requires construction knowledge beyond basic flooring skills. Proper vapor barrier installation, subfloor framing, and moisture management are critical for long-term success. For electrical work (moving outlets, installing subfloor heating), you'll need a licensed electrician.

Need help finding contractors for basement insulation or subfloor work? Find professionals through the New Brunswick Construction Network at newbrunswickconstructionnetwork.com.

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Q3

What are the signs that subfloor water damage has spread to the floor joists in a NB home?

Water damage that has spread from the subfloor to floor joists creates serious structural concerns that require immediate professional assessment. In New Brunswick's Maritime climate, this progression happens faster than in drier provinces due to our persistent humidity and slower drying conditions.

Visual indicators are your first warning signs. Look for dark staining or discoloration on exposed joist edges in basements or crawl spaces — this appears as brown, black, or gray streaking that wasn't there originally. White, fuzzy mold growth on joist surfaces indicates the wood moisture content has remained above 20% for extended periods. You might also notice the wood grain "raising" or becoming rough and fibrous as the cellular structure breaks down from prolonged moisture exposure.

Structural symptoms become apparent as the damage progresses. Floors that feel spongy, bouncy, or noticeably sag when you walk across them suggest the joists have lost structural integrity. Squeaking that develops suddenly in areas that were previously quiet often indicates fastener withdrawal as wet wood shrinks and swells. In severe cases, you'll see visible sagging of the floor surface or cracks appearing in drywall ceilings below the affected area.

Moisture and odor clues are particularly telling in NB homes. A persistent musty smell that doesn't improve with ventilation indicates ongoing moisture problems and likely mold growth within the joist cavities. Using a moisture meter on accessible joist surfaces, readings consistently above 19% suggest active water intrusion. In Maritime conditions, joists can stay wet for months after the initial water event due to poor air circulation and high ambient humidity.

Advanced deterioration signs require immediate action. Joists that feel soft or "punky" when probed with a screwdriver have begun to rot and are losing load-bearing capacity. Wood that crumbles, flakes, or can be easily penetrated indicates advanced decay. You might also notice insects like carpenter ants, which are attracted to moisture-damaged wood and common in NB's humid environment.

Common NB scenarios where this damage pattern occurs include spring flooding in river valley communities like Fredericton and Miramichi, ice dam damage during freeze-thaw cycles, and chronic moisture migration through basement concrete slabs. Older NB homes with board subfloors over widely-spaced joists are particularly vulnerable because water can pool in joist bays and remain trapped for extended periods.

Immediate steps if you suspect joist damage include stopping any ongoing water source, improving ventilation to the affected area, and documenting the damage with photos for insurance purposes. However, assessing the structural integrity of floor joists requires professional expertise — a structural engineer or experienced contractor needs to determine load-bearing capacity and repair requirements.

Never ignore these warning signs in NB's climate. What starts as minor subfloor water damage can compromise your home's structural integrity within months due to our persistent moisture conditions. Professional assessment costs \$200-\$500 but prevents catastrophic floor collapse and much more expensive emergency repairs.

Need help finding a structural contractor or flooring professional to assess water damage? The New Brunswick Construction Network can connect you with qualified professionals in your area.

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What subfloor ventilation is needed under a raised floor system in a damp NB crawl space?

Proper subfloor ventilation in a damp NB crawl space requires cross-ventilation with foundation vents spaced every 8-10 feet around the perimeter, plus vapour barriers and moisture management to prevent flooring problems above.

In New Brunswick's Maritime climate, crawl space moisture is one of the most serious threats to flooring performance. Spring snowmelt, summer humidity, and our high water table create persistently damp conditions under raised floor systems. Without adequate ventilation, this moisture migrates upward through the subfloor assembly, causing hardwood cupping, laminate swelling, subfloor rot, and mould growth.

Foundation Ventilation Requirements The National Building Code requires crawl space foundation vents totaling 1 square foot of opening per 500 square feet of crawl space area. In NB's damp conditions, aim for the higher end — 1 square foot per 300-400 square feet. Position vents on opposite walls to create cross-ventilation, with at least one vent within 3 meters of each corner. Standard foundation vents are 8"x16" (providing about 0.6 square feet of opening) or 6"x12" (about 0.4 square feet). Space these every 8-10 feet around the perimeter rather than clustering them on one side.

Install vents 6-8 inches below the top of the foundation wall to prevent snow blockage but high enough to stay above typical ground moisture. In NB, close vents during the coldest months (December through February) to prevent freeze damage to plumbing, but reopen them by March when spring moisture begins building up.

Moisture Barriers and Drainage Ventilation alone won't solve moisture problems in NB crawl spaces. Install 6-mil polyethylene vapour barrier over the entire crawl space floor, overlapping seams by 6 inches and sealing with tape. Extend the barrier 6 inches up foundation walls and seal to the concrete. This prevents ground moisture from evaporating into the crawl space air.

Ensure proper drainage around the foundation — gutters, downspouts, and grading that slopes away from the house. Standing water against foundation walls in NB's clay soils creates hydrostatic pressure that forces moisture through concrete and into crawl spaces.

Subfloor Considerations Over damp crawl spaces, use pressure-treated lumber for sill plates and rim joists. Install subfloor sheathing (5/8" plywood or OSB minimum) with gaps between sheets for expansion. In persistently damp conditions, consider adding a second vapour barrier between the subfloor and finished flooring — especially critical under hardwood or laminate installations.

When to Hire a Professional Crawl space moisture problems often indicate larger foundation or drainage issues requiring structural assessment. If you see standing water, white mineral deposits (efflorescence) on foundation walls, or musty odours, hire a foundation contractor or building envelope specialist before installing any flooring above. Moisture meters reading above 19% in subfloor lumber indicate conditions too wet for most flooring installations.

For severe moisture problems, consider encapsulating the crawl space with sealed vapour barriers, dehumidification, and conditioned air rather than traditional ventilation — but this requires professional design and installation to meet NB building code requirements.

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Q5

How do I insulate a subfloor over an unheated crawl space to prevent cold floors in a Bathurst winter?

Insulating the subfloor over an unheated crawl space is essential in Bathurst's harsh winters, but this falls outside flooring installation and into general construction and insulation work. For comprehensive guidance on crawl space insulation, vapor barriers, and thermal bridging solutions, I'd recommend connecting with insulation and general construction professionals through the New Brunswick Construction Network.

However, I can share how **cold subfloors directly impact your flooring choices and performance** in northern New Brunswick's climate.

Cold subfloors create serious flooring challenges beyond just comfort. In Bathurst's long heating season (October through April), cold air infiltration through an uninsulated crawl space creates temperature differentials that

cause hardwood floors to shrink excessively, laminate to contract and gap at joints, and tile to feel uncomfortably cold underfoot. The temperature difference between your heated living space and cold subfloor also creates condensation risks where warm, humid indoor air meets cold surfaces.

For flooring over cold subfloors, your material choices become critical. Solid hardwood performs poorly over uninsulated crawl spaces in Bathurst because the temperature swings accelerate expansion and contraction cycles. Engineered hardwood handles temperature variations better due to its cross-grain construction. Luxury vinyl plank (LVP) remains dimensionally stable regardless of subfloor temperature, making it an excellent choice for homes with crawl space issues. Carpet provides natural insulation value and feels warm underfoot, making cold subfloors less noticeable.

Radiant floor heating becomes especially valuable over cold crawl spaces. Electric radiant mats under tile or engineered hardwood can overcome cold subfloor conditions, though they increase operating costs. This requires electrical work by a licensed electrician and careful coordination with your flooring installation.

Before installing any flooring over a crawl space, address moisture concerns first. Bathurst's northern location means longer periods of frozen ground, but spring snowmelt can drive moisture up through crawl space soils. Ensure proper vapor barriers and drainage around your foundation.

When to hire professionals: Crawl space insulation, air sealing, and moisture management require construction expertise beyond flooring installation. Find insulation contractors and general construction professionals through the New Brunswick Construction Network at newbrunswickconstructionnetwork.com for comprehensive crawl space solutions before your flooring project begins.

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Q6

How do I fix squeaky subfloors before installing new carpet in my NB home?

Squeaky subfloors are caused by movement between the subfloor panel and the floor joists, and the best time to fix them is before new carpet goes down — once carpet is installed, repairs become far more difficult and disruptive. In New Brunswick's older housing stock, subfloor squeaks are extremely common and typically worsen with the province's seasonal humidity cycles.

The squeak itself comes from either **nails that have worked loose from the joist** (the nail slides up and down in the wood as you walk, creating the noise) or **subfloor panels that have slight gaps above the joist** (the panel flexes downward under your weight and rubs against the nail or adjacent panel). NB's dramatic indoor humidity swings — from 20–30% in winter to 60%+ in summer — cause wood subfloors to expand and contract annually, gradually loosening the original nails and creating these gaps over decades.

Fixing squeaks from above (the most practical approach when carpet is being replaced):

First, **locate each squeak precisely** by walking the entire floor systematically and marking squeaky spots with painter's tape. Have a helper stand below in the basement or crawl space to confirm which joist the squeak sits near. In NB homes with finished basement ceilings, you'll need to work entirely from above.

Drive screws — not nails — through the subfloor into the joists at each squeak location. Use **#8 or #10 wood screws, 2 to 2.5 inches long** (adjust length to penetrate the subfloor thickness plus at least 1 inch into the joist without poking through the ceiling below). Screws pull the subfloor tightly against the joist and hold far better than nails in NB's cycling humidity conditions. Pre-drill pilot holes to prevent splitting, especially in older, drier subfloor panels. Place screws 6–8 inches apart along the joist in problem areas, and **countersink the screw heads slightly below the subfloor surface** so they don't create bumps under the new carpet.

For widespread squeaks across an older NB home, **re-screw the entire subfloor** to every joist at 8-inch intervals. This is the nuclear option but eliminates future squeaks comprehensively. It takes a full day for a typical main floor and costs roughly **\$1–\$2/sq ft in labour** if you hire a professional, or just the cost of screws (\$50–\$100 in materials) if you do it yourself.

Fixing squeaks from below (if you have access to exposed joists in the basement):

Have someone walk on the squeaky spot while you watch from below. If you can see the subfloor panel flexing away from the joist, apply **construction adhesive (PL Premium or similar)** along the joist-to-subfloor joint and drive a short screw at an angle through the joist into the subfloor to pull it tight. For gaps between the joist and subfloor, tap a **wood shim coated in construction adhesive** into the gap to eliminate the movement.

NB-specific subfloor considerations: Many pre-1970s NB homes have **board subfloors** (individual planks rather than plywood sheets) that are more prone to squeaks and movement. Board subfloors often need a **3/8 or 1/2 inch**

plywood overlay (\$1.50–\$3.00/sq ft materials plus labour) screwed over the boards to create a stable, flat surface for new carpet. This overlay also eliminates most squeaks by locking the boards in place. Homes in river valley areas like Fredericton and Miramichi, or coastal communities with high ambient humidity, tend to have more subfloor movement and squeaking than homes in drier inland locations.

This is a solid DIY project for handy homeowners with a drill and basic skills. However, if your subfloor has soft spots, significant unevenness, or visible damage, consult a professional before installing new flooring — these may indicate joist or structural issues that go beyond a simple squeak fix.

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What type of subfloor preparation is needed for tile installation in NB?

Tile installation in New Brunswick demands the most thorough subfloor preparation of any flooring type — and getting it right accounts for 60-70% of a tile job's long-term success. A poorly prepared substrate is the number one reason NB homeowners see cracked tiles and failed grout within one to three years of installation.

The substrate underneath your tile must be structurally rigid, perfectly flat, and resistant to moisture movement. For wood-framed floors (the majority of NB homes), this means installing a layer of cement backer board (such as Durock or HardieBacker) over your existing plywood subfloor. The plywood itself should be a minimum 3/4-inch exterior-grade, screwed down firmly with no bounce or flex when you walk across it. If your subfloor flexes, the tile grout and even the tiles themselves will crack under foot traffic. Before laying backer board, many professional installers apply a layer of unmodified thinset between the plywood and cement board to eliminate any air gaps, then screw the backer board down on a 6-8 inch pattern.

For concrete slabs — common in NB basements — the preparation shifts to flatness and moisture control. Concrete must be flat to within 3mm over a 3-metre span for standard tile installation. Any dips, ridges, or rough patches need correction with self-levelling compound (\$2-\$4/sq ft applied) or grinding. More critically, NB's Maritime water table sits close to the surface in many communities, meaning basement concrete continuously releases moisture vapour. A calcium chloride test or relative humidity probe test (\$50-\$150 per area) is essential before tiling over any NB basement slab. If moisture readings exceed manufacturer limits, you will need a crack isolation or waterproofing membrane before tile installation.

New Brunswick's climate adds specific challenges that many online tile guides written for drier regions overlook entirely. Our 100+ freeze-thaw cycles per year cause subtle movement in homes built on crawl spaces or pier foundations, which can shift subfloor assemblies and telegraph cracks through rigid tile. Homes in river valley communities like Fredericton and Miramichi are particularly susceptible to spring moisture migration, so timing your tile project for late summer through fall avoids the worst seasonal moisture conditions. Coastal Saint John and Bay of Fundy homes should factor in persistently higher ambient humidity when choosing grout and adhesive products — use modified thinset rated for moisture-prone areas.

For a practical checklist, ensure your subfloor preparation includes these steps: confirm structural rigidity (no bounce), verify flatness within tolerance, install cement backer board over wood subfloors, apply waterproofing membrane in wet areas (bathrooms, laundry rooms, and any basement), test concrete for moisture, and allow self-levelling compound to cure fully before tiling. Budget \$6-\$12/sq ft for professional tile installation labour on top of your tile materials (\$3-\$8/sq ft for porcelain), with substrate preparation adding \$2-\$5/sq ft depending on the condition of your existing floor.

Tile subfloor preparation is firmly in professional territory for most NB homeowners. The combination of structural assessment, moisture testing, backer board installation, and levelling requires specialized tools and experience. A botched substrate means tearing everything out and starting over. Get matched with an experienced tile installer through the New Brunswick Construction Network to ensure your substrate is done right the first time.

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Q8

How do I level an uneven concrete basement floor before installing flooring in NB?

Levelling an uneven concrete basement floor requires self-levelling compound for most NB basements, though the approach depends on how severe the unevenness is and what flooring you plan to install on top. Minor imperfections under 6mm can often be addressed with a floor patch compound and a straight edge, while larger dips and slopes need a full self-levelling pour.

Before you touch the concrete with any levelling product, **moisture testing is the critical first step** in every New Brunswick basement. Our Maritime water table sits close to the surface across much of the province, and concrete basement slabs continuously release moisture vapour — particularly during spring snowmelt from April through June when ground moisture peaks. Use a calcium chloride test (which measures moisture vapour emission rate over 72 hours) or a relative humidity probe test drilled into the slab. Budget \$50-\$150 per test area. If moisture levels are excessive, you will need to address the moisture problem before levelling, as self-levelling compound can debond or deteriorate over excessively wet concrete.

Once moisture is confirmed within acceptable limits, here is the process for a self-levelling pour. Start by cleaning the slab thoroughly — remove any paint, adhesive residue, grease, or loose material. Grind any high spots with a

concrete grinder. Apply a bonding primer rated for self-levelling compound and let it dry per the manufacturer's instructions (typically one to two hours). Mix the self-levelling compound with a drill and paddle mixer to a pourable consistency, then pour it onto the slab, working in sections. The compound flows naturally to find its own level, and a gauge rake or smoothing tool helps guide it into low spots. Most products self-level to about 25mm thickness in a single pour; deeper areas may require multiple pours with curing time between each.

Cost for self-levelling compound in NB runs \$2-\$4/sq ft applied when done by a professional, including materials, priming, and labour. For a typical 400-square-foot basement, expect \$800-\$1,600 for levelling alone. If your slab has major structural cracks or significant slope issues (more than 25mm across the room), a professional assessment is recommended before levelling — the cracks may indicate foundation movement that levelling compound alone cannot solve.

NB-specific timing matters here. Schedule your basement levelling work for late summer through early fall when soil moisture is at its lowest. Avoid spring entirely — the snowmelt season raises the water table across the province, temporarily increasing moisture vapour transmission through your slab. Self-levelling compound needs a dry, stable substrate to bond properly, and NB's spring conditions work against you. Keep the basement at a consistent temperature (15-25°C) during curing, and run a dehumidifier to control humidity levels.

While minor patching of small dips is a manageable DIY task, a full self-levelling pour across a basement is best left to a professional. The mixing, pouring, and timing are unforgiving — the compound begins setting within 15-20 minutes, and mistakes are difficult and expensive to correct. A flooring professional can assess your slab condition, perform moisture testing, and ensure the levelled surface meets the flatness tolerances your chosen flooring requires.

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Do I need to replace my plywood subfloor before new hardwood in my older NB home?

Not necessarily — many older NB homes have plywood subfloors that are perfectly serviceable for new hardwood, but they need careful inspection first. The answer depends on the plywood's thickness, structural condition, moisture content, and flatness, all of which are particularly important given New Brunswick's challenging humidity cycles.

Start by checking what you actually have underneath your existing flooring. Many NB homes built before the 1970s have diagonal board subfloors rather than plywood, which is a different situation entirely (those require a plywood overlay). For homes with existing plywood subfloors, nail-down solid hardwood requires a minimum 3/4-inch plywood base. If your plywood is only 1/2-inch or 5/8-inch, you will either need to add a layer of 3/8-inch or 1/2-inch plywood on top (\$1.50-\$3.00/sq ft for materials and labour) or switch to engineered hardwood, which can go over thinner substrates.

Inspect for these specific problems that are common in older New Brunswick homes. Walk the entire floor slowly, feeling for soft spots — these indicate delaminated or water-damaged plywood that must be cut out and replaced. Check for squeaks, which suggest loose panels that need re-screwing to the joists. Look at the plywood from the basement or crawl space below for water stains, mould, or swelling at the edges. NB's Maritime humidity and the prevalence of older homes with less-than-ideal vapour barriers means moisture damage to subfloor plywood is more common here than in drier provinces.

Use a pin moisture meter to check the plywood's moisture content — it should read between 6-9% for hardwood installation in NB. Readings above 12% indicate a moisture problem that must be solved before any hardwood goes down. In homes near the coast (Saint John, Shediac, Bathurst) or in river valley locations (Fredericton, Miramichi), elevated subfloor moisture is especially common due to higher ambient humidity and ground moisture.

Flatness is the other critical factor. Your subfloor must be flat to within 3mm over a 2-metre span for hardwood installation. Older plywood often develops humps at panel edges and dips between joists. High spots can be sanded or planed down, while low spots are filled with floor-levelling compound or shimmed. If the subfloor has extensive waviness across the entire floor, overlaying with a new layer of plywood is often faster and more reliable than trying to flatten the old surface.

For a typical 1,000-square-foot main floor in an older NB home, budget \$1-\$5/sq ft for subfloor preparation, depending on condition. Simple re-screwing and minor patching might cost \$1,000-\$2,000, while a full plywood overlay adds \$1,500-\$3,000. The hardwood installation itself (\$8-\$14/sq ft fully installed for solid domestic species) goes on top of that.

Have a professional flooring installer assess your subfloor before committing to hardwood. They can identify structural issues, check moisture levels, and recommend the most cost-effective preparation approach for your specific home. This assessment typically happens as part of the quoting process — most NB flooring contractors will inspect your subfloor during their free estimate visit.

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What moisture barrier should I use on a concrete slab in my NB basement?

For NB basements, a 6-mil polyethylene vapour barrier is the minimum requirement under any flooring, but the best choice depends on your flooring type, moisture test results, and how your basement will be used.

Maritime moisture conditions make this decision more critical in New Brunswick than in most other provinces.

Concrete basement slabs in NB continuously release moisture vapour upward — our water table sits close to the surface in many communities, and the concrete never fully stops transmitting moisture regardless of the slab's age. This moisture migration intensifies during spring snowmelt (April through June) when ground water levels peak across the province. Without a proper barrier between your concrete and flooring, you are inviting cupping in wood products, mould growth under carpet, delamination of adhesives, and musty odours that become a permanent feature of your basement.

Here are your main moisture barrier options for NB basement slabs, from basic to premium:

A **6-mil polyethylene sheeting** (\$0.15-\$0.30/sq ft) is the basic standard. Lay it directly on the concrete with seams overlapped 6 inches and taped with poly tape. This works adequately under floating laminate or LVP where a separate underlayment with built-in vapour barrier sits on top. However, on its own, polyethylene does nothing for flatness, thermal comfort, or sound — and it can trap moisture between the poly and the concrete if drainage is poor.

A **foam underlayment with integrated vapour barrier** (\$0.50-\$1.00/sq ft) combines moisture protection with cushioning and thermal insulation in one layer. This is the most popular choice for floating LVP and laminate installations in NB basements. Look for products specifically rated for below-grade concrete application with a moisture vapour transmission rate that meets your flooring manufacturer's requirements.

Cork underlayment with vapour barrier (\$1.00-\$2.00/sq ft) provides superior thermal insulation and sound dampening — your feet will thank you on cold NB winter mornings. Cork also has natural antimicrobial properties that resist mould growth, a meaningful advantage in Maritime basement conditions.

A **dimpled drainage membrane** (such as Delta-FL or DMX One-Step, \$1.50-\$3.00/sq ft) is the premium choice for NB basements and the one I recommend most strongly for homes in flood-prone river valleys, coastal areas, or any basement with a history of dampness. The raised dimples create a continuous air gap between the concrete and your flooring, allowing moisture vapour to dissipate harmlessly rather than being trapped against the flooring. Some products combine the drainage membrane with a built-in foam top layer, eliminating the need for separate underlayment.

Before choosing any barrier, test your slab's moisture levels. A calcium chloride test or relative humidity probe test (\$50-\$150) tells you exactly what you are dealing with. If results show excessive moisture, no barrier alone will solve the problem — you may need exterior drainage improvements, a sump pump, or interior waterproofing before installing any flooring.

For most NB basement flooring projects, a dimpled drainage membrane paired with waterproof LVP is the safest, most durable combination. A flooring professional familiar with Maritime basement conditions can assess your specific slab and recommend the appropriate moisture management approach for your situation.

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Q11

How do I test concrete moisture levels before flooring installation in New Brunswick?

Testing concrete moisture before flooring installation is one of the most important steps in any NB basement or slab-on-grade project — and skipping it is gambling with thousands of dollars. New Brunswick's Maritime water table and seasonal moisture cycles make this step even more critical here than in drier provinces.

There are three main testing methods, each with different levels of accuracy and cost.

The calcium chloride test (ASTM F1869) is the most widely used quantitative method for NB flooring projects. You tape a small dish of calcium chloride crystals to the clean concrete surface, seal it under a plastic dome, and leave it for 60-72 hours. The crystals absorb moisture vapour from the concrete, and the weight gain tells you the moisture vapour emission rate (MVER) in pounds per 1,000 square feet per 24 hours. Most flooring manufacturers

require an MVER of 3 lbs or less for glue-down installations and 5 lbs or less for floating floors. Test kits cost \$20-\$35 each and are available at NB building supply stores. Use one kit per 1,000 square feet of floor area, plus one additional kit for each identifiable moisture concern area (near foundation walls, around floor drains, or where staining is visible).

The relative humidity probe test (ASTM F2170) is more accurate and increasingly preferred by flooring manufacturers. Small holes are drilled into the slab to a depth of 40% of the slab thickness, plastic sleeves are inserted, and RH probes are placed inside and left for a minimum of 72 hours to equilibrate. Most flooring products require readings below 75-80% RH. This method measures moisture within the slab rather than just at the surface, giving a more reliable picture of long-term conditions. Professional testing runs \$100-\$150 per probe location.

A simple plastic sheet test is a quick, free preliminary check. Tape a 2-foot square piece of clear plastic tightly to the concrete using duct tape around all edges. Wait 24-48 hours, then check for condensation under the plastic or darkening of the concrete. If either is present, you have a moisture issue that requires quantitative testing before proceeding. This method does not give you numbers, but it quickly identifies obvious problems.

Timing is critical in New Brunswick. Our spring snowmelt season (April through June) dramatically raises the water table, temporarily increasing moisture vapour transmission through basement slabs across the province. If you test during the driest period (August-September) and install flooring based on those results, you may be blindsided by moisture levels that double or triple come spring. The safest approach is to test during or shortly after spring snowmelt season to capture worst-case conditions. If that is not practical, test at whatever time is available but factor in that spring readings could be significantly higher.

For basement slabs in river valley communities like Fredericton and Miramichi, or coastal areas like Saint John and Bathurst, err on the conservative side — these locations experience higher ground moisture year-round.

Most NB flooring contractors include moisture testing as part of their assessment process when quoting basement installations. If yours does not, ask why. A professional who skips moisture testing on an NB basement slab is cutting a critical corner. The \$50-\$150 cost of proper testing is negligible compared to the \$5,000-\$15,000 cost of a failed flooring installation.

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Q12

What is the cost of subfloor repair in a New Brunswick home?

Subfloor repair in a New Brunswick home typically costs \$1-\$5 per square foot depending on the type and extent of damage, with most whole-room repairs falling between \$500 and \$3,000. The wide range reflects the reality that subfloor problems vary enormously — from minor re-screwing to full structural joist repair.

Here is a breakdown of common subfloor repair costs in the NB market for 2025-2026. **Minor repairs** such as re-screwing loose plywood panels to eliminate squeaks, patching small damaged sections, and filling low spots with levelling compound typically run \$1-\$2/sq ft. For a 200-square-foot bedroom, that is \$200-\$400. **Moderate repairs** including replacing water-damaged plywood sections, installing a plywood overlay over old board subfloors, and applying self-levelling compound over uneven concrete run \$2-\$4/sq ft. A 300-square-foot living room might cost \$600-\$1,200. **Major repairs** involving structural joist sistering or replacement, full subfloor sheet replacement, and addressing rot or insect damage run \$4-\$8/sq ft or more, depending on accessibility and structural complexity.

The plywood overlay deserves special mention because it is so common in older NB homes. Many houses built before the 1970s have diagonal board subfloors that are too uneven and gappy for modern flooring. Installing a 3/8-inch or 1/2-inch plywood overlay on top costs \$1.50-\$3.00/sq ft for materials and labour — a typical 1,000-square-foot main floor overlay runs \$1,500-\$3,000. This is usually far more cost-effective than trying to flatten and fill an old board subfloor.

New Brunswick's Maritime climate is a major factor in subfloor damage. Our seasonal humidity swings (indoor RH can range from 20% in winter to 65%+ in summer) cause wood subfloor materials to expand and contract year after year, loosening fasteners and creating squeaks and movement. Homes in coastal communities and river valleys are especially prone to subfloor moisture damage due to persistently higher ambient humidity and ground moisture. Crawl spaces without adequate vapour barriers — extremely common in older NB housing stock — allow ground moisture to attack the subfloor from below, leading to rot, delamination, and soft spots that worsen every spring when snowmelt raises the water table.

Additional costs to factor into your budget include old flooring removal (\$1-\$4/sq ft depending on the material), which is necessary before subfloor work can begin. Asbestos testing (\$25-\$50 per sample) is essential if you are

removing vinyl flooring or tile from a pre-1986 NB home. Moisture testing (\$50-\$150 per area) should be done on any subfloor that shows signs of water damage. And baseboard removal and reinstallation adds \$2-\$4 per linear foot.

NB labour rates for subfloor work run approximately 10-15% below the national Canadian average, which helps keep costs manageable. However, prices vary 25-40% between contractors for identical scope, so **getting three or more quotes is essential**. A flooring professional can assess your subfloor during a free estimate visit and provide an accurate repair quote based on your home's specific conditions. Browse flooring contractors in your area through the New Brunswick Construction Network directory to find installers experienced with NB's older housing stock.

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Can I install new flooring over old board subfloors in a pre-1970s NB home?

Yes, you can install new flooring over old board subfloors, but not directly — you will almost certainly need a plywood overlay first to create a smooth, stable surface. Pre-1970s New Brunswick homes commonly have diagonal or straight-laid board subfloors made of 1x6 or 1x8 spruce or fir boards, and while these are structurally sound in most cases, they are too uneven and gappy for modern flooring materials.

The gaps between old boards are the primary problem. Individual boards shrink and swell with NB's dramatic seasonal humidity cycles, and after 50-plus years, the gaps between planks can be 3-6mm wide. These gaps telegraph through thin flooring like laminate, LVP, and even hardwood over time, creating visible ridges and dips in your finished floor. The boards themselves may also be cupped, warped, or sitting at slightly different heights — none of which modern click-lock or nail-down flooring can accommodate without a flat substrate underneath.

The standard solution is a plywood overlay. Install 3/8-inch or 1/2-inch exterior-grade plywood directly over the existing board subfloor, screwed down on a 6-8 inch pattern into the boards and underlying joists. This creates the smooth, flat, continuous surface that modern flooring requires. Use exterior-grade plywood rather than interior-grade — NB's Maritime humidity means the adhesives in interior-grade plywood can weaken over time, especially in homes without consistent climate control. Budget \$1.50-\$3.00/sq ft for the plywood overlay including materials and installation labour.

Before installing the overlay, **walk the entire floor carefully and address any structural issues.** Re-screw any loose boards to the joists below to eliminate squeaks and movement. Check for soft spots by pressing firmly with your foot — soft areas indicate rot or insect damage in the boards or joists beneath, which must be repaired before covering with plywood. In older NB homes, particularly those near the coast or in areas prone to spring flooding, moisture damage to subfloor boards is common and may not be visible from above.

Inspect from below if possible. Access through the basement or crawl space lets you check joist condition, look for water stains or mould, and verify that the board subfloor is adequately supported. Older NB homes sometimes have undersized joists by modern standards, which can cause excessive bounce. If the floor noticeably bounces when you walk across it, sistering additional joists (adding new joists alongside the existing ones) may be needed before any new flooring — this is structural work that requires a professional assessment.

One important consideration: **adding a plywood overlay raises your floor height by 10-12mm**, which affects door clearance, appliance fit (especially dishwashers and refrigerators), and transitions to adjacent rooms. You will likely need to trim the bottoms of doors and plan for transition strips where the new floor meets existing flooring in other rooms.

While handy homeowners can manage a plywood overlay as a DIY project, the assessment of the existing board subfloor's structural condition is best done by a professional, especially in NB homes over 50 years old. Hidden moisture damage, inadequate joist sizing, and insect damage are common enough in our housing stock that a professional eye can save you from covering up problems that will only get worse under your new floor.

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Q14

How flat does a subfloor need to be for LVP installation in NB?

Your subfloor must be flat to within 3mm over a 2-metre span (roughly 1/8 inch over 6 feet) for luxury vinyl plank installation — and in New Brunswick's climate, hitting this tolerance matters even more than in drier provinces. LVP is a thin, semi-flexible material that conforms to whatever is beneath it, so every bump, dip, and ridge in your subfloor will eventually show through the finished floor.

To check your subfloor's flatness, lay a long straight edge (a 6-foot level or a straight 2x4) across the floor in multiple directions and look for gaps underneath. Slide a business card or a 3mm spacer under the straight edge — if it slides under freely at any point, that area needs attention. Check the entire room systematically, paying special attention to panel edges in plywood subfloors, areas around floor drains in basements, and transitions near walls and doorways.

High spots can be sanded down with a belt sander on plywood or ground with a concrete grinder on slab floors. This is straightforward work that experienced DIYers can handle. **Low spots** of 6mm or less can be filled with floor-patching compound or self-levelling compound, allowed to cure, and sanded smooth. Deeper depressions (more than 6mm) require a self-levelling pour (\$2-\$4/sq ft applied) that flows across the floor to create a uniformly flat surface. For plywood subfloors with severe waviness — common in older NB homes where the original boards

beneath have cupped and shifted over decades — a plywood overlay (\$1.50-\$3.00/sq ft) may be the most practical solution.

Why flatness matters so much for LVP in New Brunswick comes down to our climate. NB's seasonal humidity swings cause subtle movement in wood-framed floors throughout the year. A subfloor bump that barely causes a problem in July may create a noticeable ridge by January as the surrounding wood contracts in the dry heated air. The reverse happens in summer — low spots can become more pronounced as the wood subfloor expands. LVP's click-lock connections are engineered to handle normal expansion and contraction, but they are not designed to absorb subfloor irregularities. Persistent high spots create stress points in the locking system that can cause clicks, pops, and eventual joint failure.

Beyond flatness, **make sure your subfloor is also clean and smooth.** Small debris — even a screw head protruding 1mm above the plywood surface, a dried drip of old adhesive, or grit left on the floor — will create a visible bump through LVP within weeks of installation. Sweep thoroughly, then check by running your hand across the surface and feeling for any irregularity. On concrete slabs, scrape off any adhesive residue from previous flooring and grind down rough patches or trowel marks.

Most NB homeowners can handle minor subfloor preparation for LVP — sanding a few high spots, filling small dips, and ensuring a clean surface. But if your subfloor needs extensive levelling work, particularly on concrete basements where moisture testing is also essential, a professional installer will ensure the substrate meets manufacturer specifications. This preparation work is typically included in professional LVP installation quotes (\$5-\$12/sq ft fully installed), though extensive levelling may be quoted separately.

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Q15

What causes soft spots in subfloors of older New Brunswick homes?

Soft spots in older NB subfloors are almost always caused by moisture damage — either rot in the subfloor sheathing, deterioration of the floor joists below, or a combination of both. New Brunswick's Maritime climate makes this one of the most common structural issues in the province's older housing stock, and it should never be ignored.

The most frequent cause is **prolonged moisture exposure from below**. Older NB homes often have crawl spaces or basements with inadequate or missing vapour barriers, allowing ground moisture to rise continuously into the floor assembly. Over decades, this moisture weakens the wood fibres in both the subfloor boards and the joists supporting them. The problem is worst near exterior walls, around plumbing penetrations (bathrooms, kitchens), and in areas above unheated crawl spaces where condensation forms during NB's cold winters. Homes in coastal communities like Saint John and along the Bay of Fundy, or in river valley locations like Fredericton and Miramichi, experience persistently higher ground moisture that accelerates this deterioration.

Plumbing leaks are the second most common culprit. A slow drip from a bathroom drain, a weeping toilet wax ring, or condensation on cold water pipes can saturate a localized section of subfloor over months or years before anyone notices. By the time the floor feels soft underfoot, the damage is often extensive. In older NB homes with galvanized steel or cast iron drain pipes, corrosion and pinhole leaks are common as these systems reach the end of their service life.

Delamination of plywood affects homes built from the 1950s through the 1970s when interior-grade plywood was commonly used for subfloors. NB's humidity cycles — indoor relative humidity swinging from 20-30% in winter up to 60%+ in summer — cause repeated expansion and contraction that weakens the glue layers in interior-grade plywood over time. The layers separate, losing their structural rigidity and creating the spongy feeling underfoot.

Insect damage is another factor, though less common than moisture. Carpenter ants and powder post beetles can hollow out both subfloor boards and joists in NB homes, particularly in areas where moisture has softened the wood and created hospitable conditions for insects. If you see fine sawdust (frass) near the soft area, insect damage is likely contributing.

Older homes with **inadequate joist sizing or spacing** may also develop soft spots simply from structural fatigue. Building practices and code requirements were different 60-80 years ago, and some older NB homes have joists that would not meet current standards for span and spacing. Add in the accumulated effects of Maritime moisture and decades of use, and these floors gradually lose rigidity.

Do not simply cover soft spots with new flooring. The soft area will continue to deteriorate and can eventually become a safety hazard. At minimum, you need to identify the cause (moisture, rot, insects, structural) and address it before any flooring project. Access the area from the basement or crawl space to visually inspect the joists and

underside of the subfloor. Look for discolouration, crumbling wood, visible mould, or insect activity.

This is firmly professional territory. A soft spot may be a \$200 patch or a \$5,000 structural repair — you will not know until someone qualified looks at it from below. A flooring contractor or general contractor experienced with NB's older housing stock can assess the damage, identify the root cause, and recommend the most cost-effective repair before your new flooring goes down.

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Do I need underlayment for every type of flooring in my NB home?

No, not every flooring type requires a separate underlayment — but in New Brunswick's Maritime climate, some form of moisture protection is needed for almost every installation, especially over concrete. The answer depends on your flooring type, subfloor material, and whether you are installing above or below grade.

Here is a breakdown by flooring type for NB conditions.

Laminate flooring always requires underlayment. Laminate's HDF core is vulnerable to moisture from below, and the floating installation method needs a cushioning layer to reduce noise and accommodate minor subfloor irregularities. Use a foam underlayment with an integrated vapour barrier (\$0.50-\$1.00/sq ft) over any subfloor in NB. Over concrete basement slabs, this vapour barrier is absolutely critical — Maritime ground moisture migrates continuously through concrete. One important rule: if your laminate comes with pre-attached padding on the underside, do **not** add a separate underlayment on top of that. Doubling up cushion layers creates excessive give that damages click-lock connections over time.

Luxury vinyl plank (LVP) follows similar rules to laminate, with one key difference — many LVP products come with pre-attached underlayment, and manufacturers of those products specifically state that no additional underlayment should be used. Check your product's installation guide first. If your LVP does not have pre-attached padding, use a thin foam underlayment (1-1.5mm) with a vapour barrier. Over NB basement concrete, the vapour barrier is non-negotiable regardless of what is pre-attached.

Nail-down solid hardwood does not use a traditional cushioned underlayment — the flooring is fastened directly to the plywood subfloor, and any cushion layer would compromise the nail hold. However, NB installers commonly lay 15-lb asphalt felt (tar paper) or a specialized hardwood vapour retarder between the subfloor and hardwood. This reduces squeaks, provides a mild moisture buffer, and allows the hardwood to move freely with seasonal expansion. Cost is minimal — roughly \$0.20-\$0.40/sq ft.

Engineered hardwood depends on the installation method. Floating engineered hardwood needs underlayment similar to laminate. Glue-down engineered hardwood goes directly onto the subfloor with no underlayment — the adhesive bonds to a clean, flat surface. Nail-down engineered hardwood uses felt paper, same as solid hardwood.

Tile flooring does not use underlayment in the traditional sense. Tile requires a rigid substrate — cement backer board over plywood, or properly prepared concrete. A cushioned underlayment under tile would cause cracked tiles and failed grout. In wet areas (bathrooms, laundry rooms), a waterproofing membrane applied over the backer board serves as the moisture protection layer.

Carpet uses a separate pad (underpad or cushion) rather than what the flooring industry calls underlayment. Quality carpet pad (\$0.50-\$1.50/sq ft) provides cushion, insulation, and extends carpet life. In NB basements, use a moisture-resistant synthetic pad — never a fibre-based pad that will absorb Maritime moisture from the concrete and develop mould.

Cork underlayment (\$1.00-\$2.00/sq ft) deserves special mention for NB homes. Its thermal insulation properties make a noticeable difference during our long heating season — floors feel warmer underfoot, and it reduces heat loss through the floor assembly. It also provides excellent sound dampening and has natural antimicrobial properties that resist mould in humid Maritime conditions.

When in doubt, check your specific flooring product's installation instructions — manufacturers specify exactly what underlayment is required, recommended, or prohibited. Following these specifications also protects your warranty, which matters when you are investing \$4,000-\$15,000 in new flooring.

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Q17

How do I deal with moisture coming through my NB basement concrete slab?

Moisture migrating through a basement concrete slab is one of the most common flooring challenges in New Brunswick, and addressing it before installation is absolutely essential. The Maritime water table sits close to the surface across much of the province, and concrete is naturally porous — it acts like a giant sponge, wicking moisture vapour upward continuously. If you install flooring directly over a damp slab without proper moisture management, you are setting yourself up for mould, mildew odours, adhesive failure, and flooring that buckles or delaminates within a few years.

The first step is **testing your slab's moisture levels** before making any flooring decisions. There are two reliable methods: the calcium chloride test (ASTM F1869), which measures moisture vapour emission rate over 72 hours, and the relative humidity probe test (ASTM F2170), which measures moisture within the slab itself. A reading above 3 lbs per 1,000 sq ft per 24 hours on the calcium chloride test, or above 75% RH on the probe test, means you have a moisture problem that needs to be addressed. Professional moisture testing in NB typically costs \$50–\$150 per area, and it is money extremely well spent.

For slabs with moderate moisture, a **dimpled drainage membrane** (such as Delta-FL or DMX 1-Step) is the most effective solution for NB basements. These membranes cost \$1.50–\$3.00 per square foot and create an air gap between the concrete and your flooring, allowing moisture vapour to dissipate rather than becoming trapped against your flooring material. The dimpled membrane also provides a thermal break, making your basement floor noticeably warmer underfoot during New Brunswick's long heating season.

For slabs with more serious moisture issues, you may need to combine a drainage membrane with a topical moisture barrier coating applied directly to the concrete. Products like Mapei Planiseal VS or Bostik MVP4 create a vapour-retarding seal that blocks moisture transmission. These are applied by brush or roller and typically cost \$2–\$4 per square foot for materials and labour. In extreme cases — particularly in older Saint John, Fredericton, or Moncton homes where the slab may lack a proper sub-slab vapour barrier — you may need both a coating and a membrane.

Spring snowmelt from April through June is the worst time for basement moisture in NB. The water table rises significantly during this period, and moisture vapour transmission through your slab will be at its annual peak. If you are planning to install basement flooring, schedule the project for late summer through fall when soil moisture conditions are most favourable. And always test during spring conditions if possible — a slab that reads dry in August may be significantly wetter in May.

For flooring selection over a moisture-managed NB basement slab, **luxury vinyl plank (LVP) with an SPC or WPC core is the safest choice**, at \$5–\$12 per square foot fully installed. It is 100% waterproof and dimensionally stable regardless of humidity swings. Engineered hardwood can work over a properly prepared slab with a dimpled membrane, but solid hardwood should never be installed below grade in New Brunswick — basement moisture migration will cause cupping, warping, and eventual rot regardless of your mitigation efforts. Carpet tiles with moisture-resistant backing (\$3–\$6 per square foot) are another solid option for NB basements, as individual tiles can be lifted and replaced if moisture issues develop.

If your moisture testing reveals serious, persistent water intrusion — actual standing water, efflorescence (white mineral deposits), or slab staining — you likely need a waterproofing professional to address drainage and grading issues before any flooring work begins. A flooring installer cannot solve a foundation waterproofing problem.

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Q18

What is self-levelling compound and when do I need it for NB flooring?

Self-levelling compound is a cementitious mixture that you pour over an uneven concrete or wood subfloor to create a flat, smooth surface for flooring installation. It flows out like thick pancake batter, finds its own level through gravity, and hardens into a stable, flat surface — typically within 4–24 hours depending on the product and thickness. In New Brunswick, where many homes have older concrete basement slabs and aging wood subfloors, self-levelling compound is one of the most commonly needed subfloor preparation steps.

You need self-levelling compound when your subfloor has **dips, humps, or unevenness exceeding the tolerances required by your flooring product.** Most flooring manufacturers specify that the subfloor must be flat to within 3/16 inch (about 5mm) over a 10-foot span. For rigid flooring like tile, the tolerance is even tighter — 1/8 inch over 10 feet. If your floor exceeds these tolerances, thin flooring materials like LVP, laminate, and especially tile will telegraph every imperfection, creating visible bumps, hollow spots that flex underfoot, and accelerated wear at high points.

In New Brunswick specifically, self-levelling compound is frequently needed in several common scenarios. **Older NB homes built before the 1970s** often have concrete basement slabs that were poured without modern screeding techniques, leaving uneven surfaces with 1/4 to 1/2 inch variation across a room. **Homes in river valley communities** like Fredericton and Miramichi may have experienced subtle foundation movement from spring flooding cycles, creating gradual slopes across basement floors. And NB's **100+ annual freeze-thaw cycles** can shift pier foundations and crawl space structures, creating unevenness in ground-level wood subfloors that transfers to the floor above.

The process involves several steps. First, the subfloor must be clean, dry, and free of loose material. Any cracks wider than 1/4 inch should be filled first with a patching compound. A primer is applied to help the leveller bond to the substrate — this step is critical and should never be skipped. Then the compound is mixed to manufacturer specifications (proper water ratio is essential) and poured, starting at the far wall and working toward the exit. A gauge rake or smoother helps distribute the material evenly. Most products are walkable within 4–6 hours and ready for flooring within 24 hours for thin pours.

Self-levelling compound in NB typically costs **\$2–\$4 per square foot applied professionally**, including materials and labour. For a typical 400-square-foot basement, that is \$800–\$1,600 — a significant cost, but far cheaper than replacing flooring that fails because of an uneven subfloor. Materials alone run about \$35–\$50 per bag, and each bag covers roughly 40–50 square feet at 1/8 inch thickness.

A few important cautions for NB installations. Self-levelling compound adds weight to your floor — about 1.5 lbs per square foot per 1/8 inch of thickness. On wood subfloors, verify that your floor joists can handle the additional load before pouring. The compound also needs the room to be above 10°C during application and curing, which matters for unheated NB basements during the colder months. And while small pours in a single room can be a DIY project, larger areas or pours exceeding 1/2 inch thickness are best left to a professional — the compound sets quickly, and once it starts hardening you cannot rework it. Getting matched with an experienced flooring installer who includes proper subfloor preparation in their scope of work will save you headaches down the road.

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Should I remove old vinyl before installing new flooring or can I go over it in NB?

In many cases you can install new flooring directly over old vinyl in New Brunswick, but there are critical conditions that must be met — and one safety issue that could change your approach entirely. The decision depends on the age of the vinyl, its current condition, and what type of new flooring you plan to install.

The most important consideration is **asbestos**. Vinyl flooring and the black adhesive (known as cutback adhesive) used in NB homes built before 1986 commonly contain asbestos fibres. If your vinyl dates from the 1960s, 70s, or early 80s — which is extremely common in older homes across Moncton, Saint John, Fredericton, and smaller NB communities — you should **test it before disturbing it**. Asbestos testing costs just \$25–\$50 per sample and can be done through accredited labs. If the vinyl tests positive for asbestos, do not sand, scrape, break, or pull it up yourself. Disturbing asbestos-containing materials releases hazardous fibres that cause serious lung disease. You have two safe options: encapsulate it by installing new flooring over top, or hire a licensed abatement professional to remove it properly.

When going over old vinyl works well: If the existing vinyl is firmly adhered to the subfloor (no loose edges, bubbles, or curling), relatively flat, and in stable condition, you can install many types of new flooring directly over it. Click-lock LVP and laminate floating floors work especially well over old vinyl because they do not require adhesive bonding to the substrate. Lay the appropriate underlayment with a vapour barrier (essential in NB, especially over concrete) and install your floating floor on top. The old vinyl actually acts as an additional moisture barrier. New sheet vinyl or glue-down LVT can also be installed over old vinyl with proper adhesive and preparation.

When you should remove it: If the old vinyl is peeling, bubbling, crumbling, or has significant damage, it will compromise the new floor above it. Loose vinyl creates a weak bond layer — adhesive-applied flooring like glue-down vinyl or tile cannot grip a substrate that is itself coming loose. Severely damaged vinyl also creates uneven spots that telegraph through thin flooring. Additionally, if you are installing ceramic or porcelain tile, removal is almost always necessary because tile requires a rigid, stable substrate and thin-set mortar does not bond reliably to vinyl surfaces.

For NB basement installations specifically, going over old vinyl is often the smarter choice even beyond the asbestos concern. Removing vinyl from a concrete slab frequently pulls up the adhesive in uneven chunks, leaving a rough surface that requires extensive grinding or self-levelling compound (\$2–\$4 per square foot) to smooth out. If the vinyl is well-adhered and flat, installing a dimpled drainage membrane (\$1.50–\$3.00 per square foot) over the old vinyl and then your new flooring on top gives you moisture management and a smooth substrate in one step.

The cost difference is meaningful. Professional old flooring removal runs \$1–\$4 per square foot depending on the material and difficulty. For a 500-square-foot basement, that is \$500–\$2,000 in removal costs that you may be able to avoid entirely by going over the existing vinyl. However, going over it does raise your finished floor height by the thickness of the new flooring plus underlayment — typically 8–15mm total. Check door clearances, appliance fitment (especially dishwashers and refrigerators), and transitions to adjacent rooms before committing to this approach.

If you are unsure about asbestos content or subfloor condition, a professional flooring installer can assess both during an estimate visit. Getting matched with a knowledgeable local installer through New Brunswick Flooring is free and takes the guesswork out of these decisions.

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