

# CLEAN UP AFTER A FLOOD

***The walls, floors, closets, shelves, contents - every flooded part of your house - should be completely washed and disinfected. Some projects, such as washing clothes, may have to wait until all the utilities are restored. Others may be best done by professionals.***

## CLEAN UP SUPPLIES

The Red Cross and other organizations often distribute cleanup kits after a disaster. These contain many useful items such as a broom, mop, bucket, and cleaning supplies.

In most cases, household cleaning products will do the job if you use them correctly. Check the label on the products to see how much to use. Some products shouldn't be used on certain materials; the label will tell you that. Apply cleaner and give it time to work before you mop or sponge it up. Follow directions and all safety precautions on the container.

After cleaning a room or item, go over it again with a disinfectant to kill the germs and smell left by the floodwaters. You may also need to get rid of mildew, an unwelcome companion to moisture that shows as fuzzy splotches.

### Cleaning Supplies Checklist

- Brooms, mops, brushes, sponges
- Buckets, hose
- Rubber gloves
- Rags
- Cleaning products
- Disinfectants
- Lubricating oil
- Trash bags
- Hair dryer

## CLEANING TIPS

Tackle one room at a time. A 2-bucket approach is most efficient: use one bucket for the cleaning solution and the other bucket for the rinse water. Rinse out your sponge, mop, or cleaning cloth in the rinse bucket. Wring it

as dry as possible and keep it rolled up tight as you put it in the other bucket. Let it unroll to absorb the cleaning solution. Using two buckets keeps most of the dirty rinse water out of your cleaning solution. Replace the rinse water frequently. (See box below for types of products to clean, disinfect, and remove mildew.)

### Clean

1st choice: Nonsudsing household cleaners.

2nd choice: Laundry soap or detergent.

### Disinfect

1st choice: Household disinfectants or sanitizers, such as the quaternary, phenolic, or pine-oil disinfectants. (Check labels for the contents.)

2nd choice: 1/4 cup (2oz) of liquid chlorine bleach mixed in 1 gallon of water. (see below.)

### Remove Mildew

1st choice: Household mildew removers or mildewcides.

2nd choice: Washing soda or trisodium phosphate (available at grocery or paint stores). Use 5 tablespoons for each gallon of water.

3rd choice: 1/4 cup (2oz) of laundry bleach mixed in 1 gallon of water. (see below).

### Bleach

Liquid chlorine bleach, such as Clorox bleach or Purex bleach, can do a variety of flood cleanup jobs. Make sure that 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite is the only active ingredient. Bleach that has a scent added to improve its smell is available. Scented bleach is fine for cleanup jobs, but don't use it to purify drinking water. Don't use dry bleach or any bleach that does not contain chlorine.

Be careful of fumes, and wear rubber gloves. Read the safety instructions on the label. Do not mix bleach with other household chemical products, especially ammonia or toilet bowl cleaner; the chemical reaction can create a poisonous gas. Do not use bleach on aluminum or linoleum.

## **Walls**

Start cleaning a wall at the bottom or where the worst damage was. If you did not have to remove the wallboard or plaster, you may find the wallboard or plaster won't come clean and you will want to replace it rather than clean it. If you *have* removed the wallboard or plaster, wash the studs and sills and disinfect them.

## **Windows**

If you taped your windows before the storm, clean the tape off as soon as possible. The sun will bake the adhesive into the glass. If glass cleaners don't remove the adhesive, try tar remover, acetone, nail polish remover, or a razor blade. And next time, don't bother taping the windows. You don't get much protection for all that effort.

## **Furniture**

Don't try to force open swollen wooden doors and drawers. Take off the back of the piece of furniture to let the air circulate. You will probably be able to open the drawers after they dry.

Solid wood furniture can usually be repaired and cleaned, but wood veneer often separates and warps. Wood alcohol or turpentine applied with a cotton ball may remove white mildew spots on wood. Cream wood restorers with lanolin will help restore good wooden furniture parts.

Upholstered furniture soaks up contaminants from floodwaters and should be cleaned only by a professional. This is also true of carpets and bedding. Unless the piece is an antique or very valuable, upholstered furniture soaked by floodwaters should probably be thrown out. Get a cost estimate from a professional to see if furniture is worth saving.

## **Appliances**

There's an unexpected danger of shock with some electrical appliances such as TV sets and radios. Certain internal parts store electricity even when the appliance is unplugged. Check the back for a warning label. Appliances with such labels will need

professional cleaning. Be sure to get a cost estimate to see if they are worth saving.

You'll need appliances such as the washing machine, dryer, dishwasher, and vacuum cleaner to help clean your house and its contents. The motors or heating elements can usually be cleaned. If you can't wait for a professional cleaning job, unplug, disassemble, and hose off the appliances thoroughly (with hot water, if possible). Then clean and disinfect them, but do not use detergents.

Clean and disinfect dishwasher, washing machines, and dryers only with water that has been declared safe for drinking. Make sure the sewer line is working before you start a dishwasher or washing machine.

You can speed up the drying process for motors and parts by using a blow dryer or a moisture displacement spray. Moisture displacement sprays, such as electronics parts cleaners or WD-40 lubricating and penetrating oil, are available at hardware or automotive parts stores. The sprays can also stop rust and corrosion until the appliance can be disassembled and cleaned. One work of caution: the spray is flammable. Read and follow label instructions and precautions.

Moving parts such as motors and pulleys will need oil or grease. Contacts and electrical switches can be cleaned with a moisture displacement spray or an aerosol contact cleaner available at electronics or auto parts stores. Allow a motor to run for 30 minutes with no load before you use it. For example, run the vacuum cleaner without connecting the belt.

*Watch for stripped or damaged insulation around wires. Be sure all appliances are properly grounded. Appliances that must be grounded have a round third prong or a grounding wire on their plugs.*

Refrigerators, freezers, and ovens are more complicated. They may have foam insulation and sealed components that suffered little water damage. But these appliances hold food, and so they should be cleaned, disinfected, and checked by a professional or replaced. If your repair person says an expensive appliance should be replaced get the opinion in writing and discuss it with your

insurance adjuster before you spend money for another one.

### ***Clothing and Linens***

Even if your washing machine did not get wet, do not use it until you know that the water is safe enough to drink and that your sewer line works. (Perhaps a friend or relative has a washing machine you can use until yours is clean and working.)

Before you wash clothes in the washing machine, run the machine through one full cycle. Be sure to use hot water and a disinfectant or sanitizer.

Take clothes and linens outdoors and shake out dried mud or dirt before you wash them in detergent and warm water if possible. Adding chlorine bleach to the wash cycle will remove most mildew and will sanitize the clothing, but bleach fades some fabrics and damages other fabrics. You can buy other sanitizers, such as pine oil cleaners, at the grocery store to sanitize fabrics that cannot be bleached.

If the label says "Dry Clean Only" shake out loose dirt and take them to a professional cleaner. Furs and leather items are usually worth the cost of professional cleaning. If you want to clean leather yourself, wash the mud off and dry the leather slowly away from heat or sunlight.

### ***Kitchen Items***

Throw out soft plastic and porous items that probably absorbed whatever the floodwaters carried. Floodwaters are contaminated, so you may want to wash dishes by hand in a disinfectant. Air dry the disinfected dishes; do not use a dish towel.

Like the washing machine, the dishwasher should be used only after you know your water is safe to drink and your sewer line works. Clean and disinfect it first. Then use a hot water setting to wash your pots, pans, dishes, and utensils. (If you have an energy saving setting, do not use it.)

### ***Food***

Throw out any food that has been touched by floodwaters. Even canned food should be

discarded if the cans got wet during the flood because there is no way to be absolutely certain the food inside is safe. Do not keep food in bottles or jars with bottle caps or screw-on lids - they do not keep out floodwaters.

*The U.S. Department of Agriculture operates a food safety hotline. Professional home economists can answer your questions about whether to keep or discard food. Call 1-800-535-4555 between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. eastern time, Monday through Friday.*

### ***Paper and Books***

Valuable papers such as books, photographs, and stamp collections can be restored with a great deal of effort. They can be rinsed and frozen (in a frost-free freezer or commercial meat locker) until you have time to work on them. A slightly less effective alternative to freezing is to place paper in a sealed container, such as a plastic bag, with moth crystals.

Dry papers quickly when you thaw or unseal them. (A blow dryer will do.) Don't try to force paper products apart - just keep drying them. Photocopy valuable papers and records soon because substances in the floodwater may make them deteriorate.

If a computer disk or tape has valuable information, rinse it in clear water and put it in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Later, you can take it to a professional drying center and have the data transferred to a good disk or tape. Many companies that specialize in restoring computers and computer records after a disaster are members of the Disaster Recovery Institute. To find a member company near you, call (314) 846-2007.

### ***The Yard***

As you get rid of things from your house, don't turn your yard into a dump. Health hazards such as food and garbage must be hauled away as soon as your insurance agent or adjuster has told you how to make sure their loss is covered. Other things you throw away should be removed as soon as your insurance adjuster says it's OK.

Mosquitoes can carry many diseases, and a flood can create ideal conditions for them to

breed. Drain or remove standing water because it can become a breeding ground. Also dump water out of barrels, old tires, and cans. Check to be sure that your gutters and downspouts are clean and can drain. Ditches and drains also need to be cleaned so they can carry storm water away from your house.

If you can't get rid of standing water, your hardware or farm supply store may carry a commercial product that kills mosquito larvae but does not harm other animals. A slightly less effective method is to apply a thin film of cooking oil to the water. Repeat the application within a few days if a rain has disturbed the film.