

After the Flood — A Homeowner's Checklist

This information is provided to you by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit. If you have questions, please contact a public health inspector at 625-5930.

Introduction

After a flood, it's important to restore your home to good order as soon as possible to protect your health and prevent further damage to your house and belongings. Whether you do the work yourself or hire a contractor, this handy checklist will help you organize the clean up.

Immediate action is important. Your house and furnishings are less likely to grow mold if they are dried within 48 hours.

Before You Begin

Put your own safety first. Avoid electrical shock. Wear rubber boots. Keep extension cords out of the water. Shut the power off to the flooded area at the breaker box. Ask your electrical utility for help if needed.

Record details of damage, with photos or video if possible. Contact your insurance agent immediately and register with your municipality—your municipality may have resources you need, such as future financial assistance.

Set up a step-by-step action plan to:

- remove all water, mud and other debris
- dispose of contaminated household goods
- rinse away contamination inside the home
- remove the rinse water
- clean and dry out your house and salvageable possessions.

Be prepared to make difficult decisions about what to keep and what to throw out. Household items that have been contaminated by sewage, or that have been wet for a long time, will have to be bagged, tagged and discarded according to local regulations.

Assemble equipment and supplies:

- gloves, masks (N95 respirators) and other protective gear
- pails, mops, squeegees and plastic garbage bags
- unscented detergent
- large containers for wet bedding and clothing, and lines to hang them to dry
- you may also need to rent extension cords, submersible pumps, wet/dry shop vacuums, and dehumidifiers or heaters.

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Store valuable papers that have been damaged in a freezer until you have time to work on them.

First Steps

Remove standing water with pumps or pails, then with a wet/dry shop vacuum.

Remove all soaked and dirty materials and debris, including wet insulation and drywall, residual mud and soil, furniture, appliances, clothing and bedding.

Hose down any dirt sticking to walls and furnishings, then rinse several times, removing the remaining water with a wet/dry shop vacuum. Rinse, then clean all floors as quickly as possible. Flooring that has been deeply penetrated by flood water or sewage should be discarded.

Work from the top down. Break out all ceilings and walls that have been soaked or that have absorbed water. Remove materials at least 500 mm (20 in.) above the high-water line. Removing only the lower part of the wall applies if action is taken immediately after the flood or wetting event. Gypsum board walls that have been exposed to high humidity or standing water for a prolonged period of time should be removed in their entirety and discarded. Ceiling tiles and panelling should be treated like drywall.

Wash and wipe/scrub down all affected or flooded surfaces with unscented detergent and water. Rinse. Repeat the process as needed. Concrete surfaces can be cleaned with a solution of TSP (trisodium phosphate) in water (one half cup TSP to one gallon of warm water). When using TSP, which is highly corrosive, wear gloves and eye protection.

Areas can be disinfected using a solution of bleach and water. When using cleaning chemicals, make sure the area is well ventilated. Make sure all surfaces to be sanitized are first cleaned of all debris and dirt so that the bleach solution can work properly.

- You can prepare a bleach solution of 1 part bleach to 10 parts water. Add ¼ cup (62 ml) of bleach to 2 and ¼ cups (562 mL) of water.

Surfaces that are dry and/or have not been directly affected by the flood water should be vacuumed with a HEPA vacuum cleaner. Further cleaning of concrete surfaces can be done with TSP. Washable surfaces can be washed with unscented detergent and water. Surface mold on wood can be removed with a vacuum-sander. Do not sand without simultaneous vacuuming. Wood that looks moldy after sanding may need to be replaced.

After cleaning the surfaces, ventilate or dehumidify the house until it is completely dry. Rapid drying is important to prevent mold growth. When the outside weather permits (low humidity and moderate temperature), open doors and windows and hasten the drying process with fans. If the outside weather is not suitable and you notice that drying is not happening fast, use dehumidifying equipment, renting extra units as necessary.

To determine if the outdoor air can help dry the air inside, place a hygrometer in the area to be dried. Let it stabilize then open a window and monitor the Relative Humidity (RH). If it goes down then it means the air is dry enough to assist the drying process. If the RH increases, close the window.

Carpets must be dried within two days. Sewage-soaked carpets must be discarded. Homeowners can't effectively dry large areas of soaked carpets themselves. Qualified professionals are required.

Ensure that all interior cavities and structural members are completely dry (which could take weeks) before closing cavities.

What to Keep or Discard

Discard and replace all insulation materials, and all less-expensive articles that have been soaked, including particleboard furniture, mattresses, box springs, stuffed toys, pillows, paper and books.

Separate valuable papers. Ask a lawyer whether you should save the papers themselves or just the information on them.

The frames of good quality wood furniture can sometimes be salvaged, but must be cleaned and dried by ventilation away from direct sunlight or heat. Consult a furniture restoration specialist. Coverings, paddings and cushions must be discarded and replaced.

Scrape heavy dirt from washable clothes, rinse and wash several times with detergent and dry quickly.

Before Moving Back In

Do not use flooded appliances, electrical outlets, switch boxes or fuse/breaker panels until they have been checked by your local utility.

If they have been soaked, consult an HVAC (Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning) contractor to replace the furnace blower motor, switches and controls, insulation and filters. Inspect all flooded forced air heating ducts and return-duct pans and have them cleaned out or replaced. Seek advice from your local utility about a water heater that has been wet. Refrigerators and freezers may need to be replaced.

Flush floor drains and sump pits with detergent and water and scrub them to remove greasy dirt and grime. Clean footing drains outside the foundation if necessary.

To Speak with a Public Health Inspector

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*Information is adapted from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation