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Cleaning Your Flooded or Water-Damaged Homeⁱ

General Cleanup

- **Get organized.** Set priorities. Remove contaminated mud first. Next scrub with detergent, then wash with a disinfectant. Thoroughly clean and dry your house before trying to live in it and before making permanent repairs.
- **Remove water from the basement slowly.** If your basement is full or nearly full of water, pump out just 2 or 3 feet of water each day. If you drain the basement too quickly, the pressure outside the walls will be greater than the pressure inside the walls. That may make the walls and floor crack and collapse.
- **Remove contaminated mud.** Shovel out as much mud as possible, then use a garden sprayer or hose to wash away mud from hard surfaces. Start cleaning walls at the bottom or where damage is worst. Remember to hose out heating ducts, disconnecting the furnace first.
- **Clean and disinfect.** Scrub surfaces with hot water and a heavy-duty cleaner. Then disinfect with a solution of 1/4 cup chlorine bleach per gallon of water or a product that is labeled as a disinfectant to kill germs. Laundry bleaches should not be used on materials that will be damaged or might fade. Sanitize dishes, cooking utensils and food preparation areas before using them. Thoroughly disinfect areas where small children play. Don't mix cleaning products. A combination of chemicals can give off toxic fumes.
- **Dry ceilings and walls.** Flood-soaked wallboard should be removed and thrown away. Plaster and paneling can often be saved, but air must be circulated in the wall cavities to dry the studs and sills. The three kinds of insulation must be treated differently. Styrofoam might only need to be hosed off. Fiberglass batts should be thrown out if muddy but may be reused if dried thoroughly. Loose or blown-in cellulose should be replaced since it holds water for a long time and can lose its antifungal and fire retardant abilities.
- **Prevent mildew growth.** Take furniture, rugs, bedding and clothing outside to dry as soon as possible. Use an air conditioner or dehumidifier to remove moisture or open at least two windows to ventilate with outdoor air. Use fans to circulate air in the house. If mold and mildew have already developed, brush off items outdoors to prevent scattering spores in the house. Vacuum floors, ceilings and walls to remove mildew, then wash with disinfectant. Wear a two-strap protective mask to prevent breathing mold spores.

Cleaning Carpet and Floors

- **Clean and dry carpets and rugs as quickly as possible.** If sewage-contaminated floodwater covered your carpeting, discard it for health safety reasons. Also discard if the carpet was under water for 24 hours or more. To clean, drape carpets and rugs outdoors and hose them down. Work a disinfecting carpet cleaner into soiled spots with a broom. To discourage mildew and odors, rinse with a solution of 2 tablespoons bleach to 1 gallon water, but don't use this solution on wool or nylon carpets. Dry the carpet and floor thoroughly before replacing the carpet. Padding is nearly impossible to clean so should be replaced. If the carpet can't be removed, dry it as quickly as possible using a wet/dry vacuum and dehumidifier. Use a fan to circulate air above the carpet, and if possible, lift the carpet and ventilate with fans underneath.
- **Remove hardwood floor boards to prevent buckling.** Remove a board every few feet to reduce buckling caused by swelling. Clean and dry wood before attempting repairs. With wood subflooring, the floor covering (vinyl, linoleum, carpet) must be removed so the subflooring can dry thoroughly which may take several months. Open windows and doors to expose the boards to as much air as possible.

Electrical Cleanup

Practice safety during initial electrical cleanup.

- **Appliances:** Electric motors must be reconditioned or replaced. To clean surfaces, use a heavy-duty cleaner and hot water, then a bleach solution. Refrigerators, freezers and ovens with foam insulation and sealed components may have little water damage, but since they hold food, they should be cleaned and disinfected.
- **Electronics:** Get a cost estimate from a professional for repairing televisions, radios, computers and similar equipment to decide if the device is worth repairing.
- **Clean-up Equipment:** When using sprayers, wet vacs, vacuum cleaners and other cleaning equipment, use an extension cord with a ground fault circuit interrupter or install a GFCI in the electrical circuits in damp environments.

Hire a professional to replace or recondition electrical wiring and equipment.

See the Information sheet provided by the National Electrical Manufacturers Association for more information

Cleaning Valuable Items

- **Wash mud off before items dry, if possible.** Photographs, books and important papers can be frozen and cleaned later. Wash the mud off. Store the articles in plastic bags and put them in a frost-free freezer to protect from mildew and further damage until you have time to thaw and clean them.

¹This information was obtained from and used with the permission of North Dakota State University. To see full text of this article go to: <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/agcomm/creative-commons>