

Cleaning Your Flooded or Water-Damaged Home

This checklist provides basic information. For details, get the publication "Repairing Your Flooded Home" at <http://www.fema.gov/library/repfhm.pdf> or from the American Red Cross or Federal Emergency Management Agency, contact your county office of the NDSU Extension Service or see Extension's Coping with Floods website at <http://www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/flood/>

Safety

- ◆ **Turn off electricity.** Stand on a dry spot or on a dry wooden block or plastic crate. Use a wooden stick or plastic pipe to pull the fuse box handle to off. Pull out the main fuses, and unscrew each circuit fuse. On a breaker box, use the stick to switch off the main breaker switch and each circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to your electric box, call an electrician or your power company. Even if the power company has turned off electricity to your area, make sure your house's power is disconnected so it won't come back on without warning.
- ◆ **Turn off gas.** If you suspect a leak or smell gas, leave your home immediately. Leave the door open. If the gas meter is outside, turn off the gas by using pliers or a wrench to turn the valve a quarter turn so the valve is perpendicular to the pipe.
- ◆ **Make sure water is safe.** Listen for announcements about the local water supply. Private water wells need to be tested and disinfected after floodwaters recede. Water that might be contaminated should be boiled at least 10 minutes.
- ◆ **Make sure food is safe.** Frozen or refrigerated foods warmed above 40 degrees for more than two hours may not be safe to eat. This includes meats, milk products, eggs, casseroles and other foods. Discard anything that is moldy or has an unusual odor or look. Partially thawed frozen foods that still have ice crystals can be safely refrozen. Most once-frozen foods that have thawed can be cooked and eaten immediately if they

haven't been above 40 degrees more than two hours. These foods can be refrozen after cooking.

- ◆ **Stay healthy.** Wash hands with soap and water often. Get a tetanus booster before working in floodwater. Disinfect dishes, appliances and other materials that may have been contaminated by floodwater.
- ◆ **Take care of yourself and your family.** Accept support from family, friends and others. Talk about your feelings to release tension. Discuss the situation with children honestly and openly. Get proper nutrition and rest. Pace yourself, and take one step at a time. Don't be afraid to get help.

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 ¼ 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.

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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. North Dakota State Electrical Board policy states:

- ◆ All breaker panel boards, breakers, fuses, disconnect switches, controllers, receptacles, switches, light fixtures and electric heaters that have been submerged must be replaced.
- ◆ All electrical equipment, switchgear, motor control centers, boilers and boiler controls, electric motors, transformers and other similar equipment such as appliances, water heaters, dishwashers and oven ranges that have been submerged need to be reconditioned by the original manufacturer or its approved representative, or replaced.
- ◆ Electrical wiring may require replacement depending on the type of wire or cable and what application it was listed for.
- ◆ Splices and termination must be checked to make sure they comply with the National Electrical Code.
- ◆ The electrical system needs to be certified by a licensed N.D. electrical contractor or inspector to assure that the electrical system will be safe to energize.

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.

Details

- ◆ **Call your insurance agent.** If your insurance covers the damage, your agent will tell you when an adjuster will contact you.
- ◆ **List damage and take photos or videotape as you clean.** You'll need complete records for insurance claims, applications for disaster assistance and income tax deductions.