



Safety After The Storm

Restoring Your Flood-Damaged Residential Property

The magnitude of damage inflicted by floods caused by hurricanes and other dangerous storms can be devastating to many homeowners. As residents begin the arduous restoration process, here are a few tips for re-entering and restoring your home.

Safety First

Following a flood, the first priority is safety. Before entering, consider the structural integrity of the property. If the building was subject to falling debris or fast-moving water, you should have it checked by a fully qualified, professional engineer. Be sure that all electrical and natural gas systems are turned off, and do not turn them on until a utility representative has inspected the site to be sure it is safe to restore power and gas. As you enter, do not use matches, cigarette lighters or any kind of open flame. Also be sure to wear hard-sole shoes and be aware that floors and stairs may be slippery with mud and debris. It's a good idea to bring bottled drinking water with you. For a more complete list of safety precautions following floods, visit the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Assemble a Team

The cleanup and restoration process is complex and can involve many people. Following a natural disaster, it's important to retain the services of a local environmental consultant with documented experience in catastrophic building failures or flood damage cleanup. This is invaluable for protecting your interests and will greatly increase your chances for a successful and cost-effective cleanup and restoration project in the quickest possible time. Qualified contractors should adhere to guidelines set by the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC). If at all possible, check references.

It may seem like common sense, but be sure to negotiate carefully for structural drying and water damage restoration services. Insist on fixed-fee contracts or unit pricing to control costs. If time-and-material contracts are necessary to expedite operations, shift to fixed-fee arrangements once the scope of the damage is understood. The environmental consultant should comment on the services proposed by the contractor.

Set Up a Triage System

The primary objectives are to keep a bad situation from getting worse and to salvage property that can be saved. To optimize returns from your time and energy and to keep the task at hand from becoming overwhelming, set up a triage system to direct resources to areas where they can have the most impact. When evaluating priorities, consider the kinds of materials you're working with:

For more information, visit: www.ul.com/stormsafety





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- Porous. If damaged by floodwaters, pressed wood furnishings and materials such as carpet, drywall and ceiling tiles must be removed because of the chemicals and bacteria carried in floodwaters. Remove these items as your first step.
- Semiporous. Some materials, such as framing lumber, can be salvaged by scrubbing and pressure washing.
- Nonporous. You can put items such as solid countertops and flooring to the side for cleaning later, as they can be restored with soap and water - then sanitized if appropriate. (Note: It's important to clean while these materials are still wet versus letting them dry out and making them wet again. Also, clean before sanitizing, as sanitizers are not effective on soiled surfaces.)

After you've removed porous materials and cleaned your semiporous and nonporous items, your items will start to dry out. To prevent mold and moisture issues, it's important the drying process be under way within 72 hours of cleaning. Materials damaged by rainwater or burst pipes may be retained only if the structure of the material is not compromised and the materials are effectively dried out within 48 hours. Keep in mind that water damage is cheaper to repair than mold damage; water damage turns to mold damage in three to seven days.

On first glance, surfaces with mold growth may seem like they need only a quick scrub with some cleaner to fix, but in reality, mold growth can be much more than just a cosmetic issue. Mold can be destructive to the internal structure of the building and may eat away at it for months or years until it is too late to save the structure. Mold also can be a health hazard. Exposure to mold spores and other components of mold colonies may trigger respiratory illnesses such as asthma and allergies.

If at all possible, damaged properties should be unoccupied during remediation. If undamaged portions must be occupied during remediation, effective engineering controls must be put in place to prevent the spread of contaminants outside the area undergoing work.

Communication and Organization

Good communication and organization are critical to keep the process running smoothly and to ensure everyone is on the same page. For insurance purposes, documenting the damage is important. For very complex remediation efforts, you may wish to consult legal counsel early on to assist with damage documentation and to act as your advocate during this very stressful time.

These tips are not intended to be a comprehensive remediation plan but to provide a foundation for assessing the situation and moving toward an effective and affordable solution.

Other resources:

- The Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification. <http://www.iicrc.org/>
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency's "Recovering From and Coping With Flood Damaged Property" Suggestions: <http://www.fema.gov/hazard/flood/coping.shtm>
- The American Red Cross' "Important Steps for Your Safe and Speedy Recovery:" <http://www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem.d229a5fo6620c6052b1ecbf43181aa0/?vgnnextoid=576d3da092c6f110VgnVCM10000089fo870aRCRD>

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