# Flood Clean-up



## Why is it important to clean up after an area has been flooded?

After a flood, it is important to restore the area to protect your health and prevent further damage. If standing water or water damaged materials are not cleaned and dried (or removed), they can present serious long-term health risks and will allow viruses, bacteria, and mould to grow which can cause disease, trigger allergic reactions, and continue to damage materials and health long after the flood.

### What are the some steps to take after a flood has occurred? Rapid drying is important to prevent mould growth.

As soon as it is possible:

1) Prepare for the clean-up. Assemble the following equipment and supplies

- Personal protective equipment (e.g., disposable gloves, suit, respirator, goggles).
- Pails, mops, sponges.
- Garbage bags.
- Soap or detergent.
- Extension cords, pumps, wet/dry vacuums, and dehumidifiers.

2) Removal of water, mud, and other debris

- Remove standing water with pumps or pails.
- Use a wet/dry vacuum to remove remaining water.
- Remove all soaked and dirty materials, debris, residual mud, and soil.
- Clean any dirt on walls and furnishings with a soap solution, removing the remaining water again with a wet/dry vacuum.

3) Dispose of contaminated items that cannot be dried

- Flooring that has been soaked by flood water should be removed and discarded.
- Dispose of all insulation materials, drywall (plaster/gypsum/Sheetrock®), carpets, particleboard furniture, mattresses, box springs, stuffed toys, pillows, cushions, and furniture coverings that have been exposed to flood water and cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried.
- Identify the materials that may be cleaned thoroughly and kept (e.g., items with hard surfaces).

4) Clean and dry effected area and salvageable items

- Surfaces that are dry and/or have not been directly affected by the flood water should be vacuumed with a High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) vacuum cleaner.
- After cleaning the surfaces with a soap solution, ventilate or dehumidify the house until it is dry.

## What types of personal protective equipment are needed?

For most work in flooded areas, the following personal protective equipment are recommended:

- Hard hat
- Goggles
- Gloves
- Boots
- Hearing protective devices
- Respirator

## What are some hazards associated with cleaning flood damage?

**Flood Water:** Flood water may have high levels of raw sewage or other hazardous substances. Early symptoms from exposure to contaminated flood water may include upset stomach, intestinal problems, headache and other flu-like discomfort. Avoid or limit direct contact with contaminated flood water by wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment, wash hands frequency with soap and clean water, report and keep dry any cuts or open wounds, and report any symptoms of illness.

**Cleaning Products:** The clean-up process involves thorough washing and disinfecting of the walls, floors, closets, shelves, and contents of the house. In most cases, common household cleaning products and disinfectants are appropriate for this task. Some disinfectants and sanitizers may contain toxic substances. It is important to read and follow label instructions carefully to check for mixing. Mixing certain types of products can produce toxic fumes. Some resources will recommend cleaning with bleach. While bleach is an effective disinfectant, it must be used with care.

**Carbon Monoxide Poisoning:** Carbon monoxide levels can build up rapidly if certain types of combustion devices (for example, gasoline-powered generators, camp stoves and lanterns, or charcoal-burning devices) are used indoors. Do not use combustion devices designed for outdoor use indoors.

**Asbestos:** Elevated concentrations of airborne asbestos can occur if asbestos-containing materials present in the home are disturbed.

**Lead:** Disturbance or removal of materials containing lead-based paint may result in elevated concentration of lead dust in the air.

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