

## Environmental Health Services Division

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## Cleaning a house after a flood

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**Cleaning a house after a flood is a major undertaking, but is very important. Careful cleaning can prevent further damage to property, reduce the chance of injury, and prevent illness.**

While cleaning, wear waterproof boots and gloves and open all doors and windows, and use fans to air out the building.

**CAUTION:** Fumes from all dry-cleaning solvents are toxic and some are flammable.

- Use only with adequate ventilation.
- Read and heed the precautions on the label.

### EXTERIOR SIDING

- Clean with a non-abrasive household detergent and rinse well.
- Clean mildew with a commercial mildew wash or mildew siding cleaner.

### WINDOWS

- Remove broken glass from the window frames.
- If windows are swollen shut:
  - Remove the small strip (inner stop) that holds the lower sash with a wood chisel.
  - Force the lower window up slightly to clear the sill, and
  - Remove it from the frame by pushing it from the outside into the hands of a helper. Do not push against the glass.
- Some windows may need to be replaced.

### DOORS

- Do not force open a closed door. The door may be swollen tight, the flooring behind it may be buckled, or debris may have piled against it.
- Make sure the door is unlocked and then carefully push it in from the outside to avoid further damage.
- Do not attempt to plane or fit a door until the door, frame, and jamb have thoroughly dried.
- Wash doors with a mild alkali solution (5 to 6 tablespoons of baking soda to a gallon of water). A non-sudsing product is preferred.

## WALLPAPER

- Badly soaked wallpaper should be removed.
- Clean unwashable wallpaper with commercial putty-like wallpaper cleaner.
- Use a mild soap or detergent and two sponges and two buckets to clean washable wallpaper.
  - One sponge is for the cleaning solution, and the other is for clear rinse water.
  - Wash the paper beginning at the top and work down to the floor.
  - Work quickly so paper does not become soaked.
- Remove grease spots from wallpaper by applying a paste of dry-cleaning fluid with cornstarch or talcum. When the dry cleaning fluid has dried, brush it off the wallpaper.

## WALLS and CEILINGS

- If walls are out of plumb or ceilings are not level, inspect the underlying foundations for movement or undermining.
- If necessary, plaster walls and ceilings may be wiped gently with a slightly damp cloth.
- Stains can be painted over or covered with wallpaper once the wall is completely dry.

## CARPETS

- Throw out wall-to-wall carpet and padding that has been saturated by flood waters. Usually these carpets can not be cleaned and dried quickly enough to prevent the growth of molds and bacteria. Wrap these in plastic and take them to an area transfer station or landfill for disposal.
- Small area rugs may be taken to a laundry or cleaners and be professionally cleaned and dried.

## DRYWALL

Throw away any dry wall that is wet. Parts of damaged drywall partitions can be replaced with new material. Make vertical edge cuts at the centers of wood studs and nail each end of the repair sheet directly to a stud.

## WOOD PANELING AND WOOD WORK

- Scrub wood paneling and other woodwork, including painted surfaces, with a stiff bristle brush, plenty of water, and a detergent.
- To remove mildew, scrub with an alkali solution (5 tablespoons of washing soda [sal soda or sodium carbonate decahydrate] or trisodium phosphate to 1 gallon of water).
  - If mold has grown into the wood under paint or varnish, use 4 to 6 tablespoons of trisodium phosphate and 3/4 cups of 5.25% household bleach to 1 gallon of water.
  - Rinse well with clear water. Allow wood to dry thoroughly.

## WOOD FLOORS

- Do not attempt to straighten warped or buckled wood floors until they have dried out.
- Remove rugs and other floor covers to allow the floor to dry more quickly.
- Mop off excess water as soon as possible.
- After the flooring is completely dry, re-nail the floor where necessary.
- Some surface roughness may be removed by planing or sanding.
- If damage is too severe, the flooring may have to be removed and relaid. If only the surface finish of wood flooring is damaged, it may be refinished.

**TILE OR TERRAZZO FLOORS**

- Remove ceramic tile or terrazzo if the underlayment was wood sub-flooring. Clean and reinstall the tiles using a moisture-proof sealant or adhesive after the underlying material has dried thoroughly or has been replaced.
- Floor tiles may loosen if the adhesives have been damaged or the underlayment or sub-flooring has warped. Remove loose pieces of tile to dry the underlayment completely, then, re-cement the tiles.

**LINOLEUM FLOORS**

- If sheet linoleum has bulged, carefully remove the entire sheet to allow the sub-flooring to dry completely. Carefully puncture any blisters with a small nail and hammer.
- Re-cement by forcing linoleum paste through the nail hole and weighing the linoleum down with boards or bricks.
- Remove broken and brittle linoleum with a chisel and a hoe.
- **CAUTION:** Older linoleum contains asbestos and needs to be professionally removed.

**INSULATION**

- Cut out any wet insulation and throw away. Piece in new insulation.