

# Disaster Relief

## *Salvaging Household Furniture*

---

Before starting to salvage damaged furniture, decide which pieces are worth restoring. Make your decision according to these factors:

- Extent of damage
- Cost of the article
- Sentimental value
- Cost of restoration

Consider each piece individually. Antiques may be worth the time, effort, and expense of restoration. Unless damage is severe, you likely can clean, reglue, and refinish antiques at home. Extensive repair or refinishing should be done at a reliable furniture repair shop.

Solid wood furniture can usually be restored, unless damage is severe. You will probably need to clean, dry and reglue the piece. You can remove and straighten slightly warped boards.

Wood-veneered furniture is available in many qualities. Extensive damage may be costly to repair. If veneer is loose in just a few places, you may be able to repair it. Upholstered furniture may be salvageable, depending on its general condition. Flooded pieces will need to be cleaned and dried, and mildew should be removed. If damage is extensive, you may have to replace padding and upholstery. This is expensive, so it might be wiser to apply the money toward new furniture.

You don't need to repair all pieces right away. Any furniture worthy of repair should be completely cleaned, dried, and stored in a dry, well-ventilated place until you have time to repair it.

### **Salvaging Flooded Upholstered Furniture**

Upholstered furniture that has been covered with floodwater may be impossible to salvage if it has been badly soaked. But if the piece seems worth the effort, you need to clean and oil the springs, replace the stuffing, and clean the frame.

#### *Stuffing and Covering*

1. Remove furniture coverings using a ripping tool, hammer, or tack puller, and screwdriver or chisel.

2. Remove all tacks from the frame.
3. Wash coverings.
4. Throw away all cotton stuffing. You can dry, fumigate, and sometimes reuse padding made of materials other than cotton.

#### *Springs and Frame*

1. Wipe off springs and frame. Dry all metal parts, and paint them with rust-inhibiting paint. Oil springs.
2. Store wood furniture where it will dry out slowly.

#### *Mildew*

Mildew may have developed on damp or wet furniture. Mildew is a gray-white mold that stains and rots fabric unless you remove it promptly. Here's how to remove mildew or mildew spots:

1. Brush with a broom to remove loose mold from outer covering. Do this outdoors, if possible, so you don't scatter mildew spots (which can start new growth) in the house.
2. Vacuum the surface to draw out mold. Dispose of the vacuum cleaner bag outside to avoid scattering mold spores in the house.
3. If mildew remains and fabric is washable, sponge lightly with thick soap or detergent suds. Wipe with a clean, damp cloth. Get as little water on the fabric as possible so the padding doesn't get wet.
4. If mold remains, wipe the furniture with a damp cloth dipped in diluted alcohol (1 cup denatured alcohol to 1 cup water) or a chlorine bleach solution (1/4 teaspoon bleach to a cup of water). Test in an area that is hidden.
5. Dry the article thoroughly.
6. Use a low-pressure spray containing a fungicide to get rid of musty odors and remaining mildew. Moisten all surfaces thoroughly. Respray frequently if mildew is still a problem. Spraying rooms with an aerosol material does not eliminate mildew problems.
7. If molds have grown into an inner part of furniture, send furniture to a dry cleaning or storage company for thorough drying and fumigation. Fumigation kills molds present at the time but will not protect against future attacks.

## Salvaging Flooded Wooden Furniture

Wooden furniture damaged by floods can best be salvaged through slow drying and proper repair.

### Submerged Furniture

1. Take furniture outdoors and remove as many drawers, slides, and removable parts as possible. Drawers and doors will probably be stuck tight. Do not try to force them out from the front. After allowing to dry for a brief period, use a screwdriver or chisel to remove the back and push out the drawer from behind.
2. After you have removed movable parts, clean off mud and dirt, using a hose if necessary.
3. Take all furniture indoors and store it where it will dry slowly. Furniture left in the sun to dry warps and twists out of shape.
4. When furniture is dry, reglue it if necessary. You need woodworking tools and clamps to reglue some pieces. Before you start, decide whether you have the time, equipment, and ability to do the work. Consult an experienced cabinetmaker if necessary. To reglue loose joints, thoroughly clean joints of old glue so the area will be as clean and free of glue as possible. Use white all-purpose glue, following the directions on the container. Hold parts together with rope tourniquets or suitable clamps. To prevent damage from ropes or clamps, pad contact areas with cloth protection.

### Damp Furniture - Removing White Spots

Furniture that has been submerged in floodwaters often shows mildew or mold that you can remove with warm soapy (mild detergent) water and a soft cloth. White spots or a cloudy film may develop on damp furniture that has not been under water. To remove white spots:

1. If the entire surface is affected, rub with a damp cloth dipped in turpentine or in a solution of 1/2 cup household ammonia and 1/2 cup water. Wipe dry at once and polish with wax or furniture polish.
2. If color is not restored, dip 000 steel wool in oil (boiled linseed, olive, mineral, or lemon). Rub lightly with the wood grain. Wipe with a soft cloth and re wax.
3. For deep spots, use a drop or two of ammonia on a damp cloth. Rub at once with a dry cloth. Polish. Rubbing cigarette ashes, powdered pumice, or a piece of walnut into spots may help remove them.
4. If spots remain after all efforts to remove them, strip off all the old finish and refinish the piece.

### Veneered Furniture

Thoroughly dry furniture. If veneer is loose in just a few places, carefully scrape glue under loose areas.

1. Press veneer back in place. Place waxed paper over affected area;

heat with warm iron. Remove iron, and place weights on the area.

2. If veneering doesn't stay in place or is bubbled, carefully slit the loose veneer with a razor blade, and apply a good quality glue. Cover the glued spots with waxed paper, and put weights on the waxed paper to prevent extra glue (which may spurt out when pressure is applied) from gluing the weights to the furniture. Repairing badly damaged veneered furniture requires special skill and tools. Unless you are an experienced woodworker, don't attempt the job yourself. Take the furniture to a cabinetmaker or have your dealer return it to the factory for repair. If insurance allows part value on flood-damaged furniture, it may be worth the money to get new things, rather than pay for extensive repairs.

## Straightening Warped Furniture Boards

Slightly warped furniture boards, as in table or dresser tops, often can be straightened if they are solid wood. But don't try to straighten severely warped parts, veneered parts (veneer usually separates), or parts with a fancy grain, such as curly maple. If such pieces are worth the money to salvage them, send them to a reliable furniture repair shop. Get a cost estimate before leaving the piece for repair.

### To straighten slightly warped boards:

1. Remove the warped board from the furniture.
2. Strip the board of its old finish. A clean board straightens better than a finished board. You may have to strip the entire piece of furniture to get an even finish when the board is straightened, refinished, and replaced.
3. The principle of warp removal is to add moisture to the dry side (concave) and remove it from the wet side (convex). Here's how you do that:
  - Place the board with the wet side (convex) down on a radiator or heat vent in the winter.
  - Place wet side (concave) up in the direct rays of the sun. Either way, keep the concave side moist with damp cloths, place bricks or other weights on top of the board, and leave it for several days or until the board is straight.
4. Clamp the board in a flat position when it has straightened. Place clamps 12 inches apart or less. Use small pieces of wood or pads between board and clamps to protect the board. Loosen clamps, and move them slightly once or twice a day to prevent splitting. You may place several boards in the same clamps. Insert small wooden blocks between boards for air space.
5. Stand the boards on end and leave them in the clamped position until thoroughly dry. This will take from several days to several weeks.
6. Paint or refinish as desired. Apply the finish to both underside and top of board. This keeps the board from absorbing moisture and from warping again