

Disaster Relief

Salvaging Clothing

Floodwater may be contaminated, so it is important to thoroughly clean and disinfect flood-soiled clothing to kill harmful bacteria. Prompt attention may save much of your clothing that has been damaged by floodwaters. If possible, do not let the floodwater and mud dry in shoes or garments.

Washable Garments

- Check the care label to make sure garments are washable.
- If labeled hand washable only, then hand wash. Do not put into the washing machine.
- If garment is dry, brush off loose dirt and residue.
- Rinse in clean, cool water to remove mud and flood water. It takes several rinses until rinse water is clear.
- Work a heavy duty detergent (liquid) or paste of granule detergent into all stained areas. Let stand 30 minutes.
- Follow care labels and wash in hottest water safe for garment with detergent. Use bleach if recommended for garment.
- Sanitize with a disinfectant. Always test on a hidden seam to be sure it does not harm the garment.

Add to washing machine before adding clothing. Here are some disinfectants to try:

- Liquid chlorine bleach (Clorox, Purex) if safe. Do not use on washable wools and silks. Follow directions carefully.
- Pine oil (Pine-O-Pine, Fyne Pine) is safe for most washable garments. Do not use on washable wools and silks, since the odor will remain.
- Phenolic (Pine-Sol, Al-Pine) is safe for most washable garments. Do not use on washable wools and silks, since the odor will remain.
- Hang garments to dry.

Dry-Cleanable Clothing

Take to the dry cleaner as soon as possible. Be sure to shake and brush well to remove as much dirt as possible. Give the dry cleaner as much information as possible about what caused the damage and the fiber content of the fabric, if you know it.

When Dry Cleaning Service Is Not Available

Garments Still Damp with Muddy Water

1. Rinse in cold water to remove water-soluble, clay-type soil. Rinse garment as quickly as possible to avoid bleeding of dyes and to lessen shrinkage.
2. Gently squeeze out water and shake out wrinkles. Rolling in dry towels helps remove extra water.
3. Place garment on hanger and dry in cool air or smooth it out on flat surface to dry.

Partly Wet Garments

1. Try to rinse out the wet portion without dipping the entire garment in cold water. If you can't do this without leaving a strong stain line, dip the entire garment.
2. Shake out wrinkles and dry in cool air.

Dry Garments with Soil in Them

The soil may be difficult to remove. Shake well to remove as much soil as possible before sending to the dry cleaner.

Wet Garments, But Not Soiled

Dry in cool air to prevent mildew and transfer of dye.

Mildew

If the garment is mildewed:

1. Go outside to brush off garment.
2. Rub liquid (or paste of granular) detergent into stain.

3. Launder using detergent and bleach (follow care label) and hottest water safe for fabric. Some mildew may be too severe to be removed.

Leather and Suede Garments and Accessories

Allow leather and suede garments, shoes, belts, and handbags to dry away from direct heat. Then do the following:

1. Brush off as much mud as possible.
2. Use mild soapsuds and cool water to wipe off remaining dirt.
3. Rinse with clean water, and wipe gently with clean

cloth until you remove all dirt. Do not get the leather or suede too wet while cleaning.

4. Stuff shoes, handbags, and sleeves with paper so they will hold their shape.
5. Dry away from sun and heat.
6. Clean with saddle soap.
7. Use an oil for leather or suede to soften and prevent stiffening. This oil may darken the leather, so check before using.
8. Use a suede brush to restore its original appearance. Be sure to brush in only one direction.

Disaster Relief

Cleaning Flood-Damaged Carpets and Rugs

When To Discard, Clean, or Call a Professional

When you have flood-damaged carpeting and rugs, your options depend on the source of flooding. If floodwater is clean basement seepage or lawn runoff into a subbasement, drying and cleaning is an easy decision. But if sewage-contaminated floodwater has covered your carpeting, you probably will need to discard it for health safety reasons.

You can assume the water and the carpet contain infectious organisms. Throw rugs can usually be saved.

General Rules

- If wall-to-wall carpeting, large area rugs, and any rug with foam backing are flooded with contaminated water, discard the item. Except for valuable rugs, the time and expense of professional cleaning generally is not worth the effort or the health risk.
- If you are determined to salvage carpeting soaked with contaminated water, consult a professional cleaning company that services carpets at its own cleaning and drying facilities. A steam cleaning (hot-water extraction) method is preferable.
- You can save wall-to-wall carpeting soaked by clean rainwater. Have it professionally cleaned or clean it using the directions below.
- You can usually clean throw rugs well enough in a washing machine.

Cleaning Rain-Soaked Carpets

Cleaning basement carpeting indoors is not a good idea in summer, because you are adding even more moisture to an already wet area. If the carpeting is installed with tack strips, you may be able to remove it and have it cleaned and reinstalled. Padding is nearly impossible to clean, so replace it. If you can't remove the carpeting, dry it as quickly as possible to lessen growth of mildew. If possible, use a wet/dry vacuum system. A dehumidifier can help remove moisture from the air. Keep windows closed when using a dehumidifier.

- When the carpet is thoroughly dry, vacuum it.
- Shampoo and repeat the drying process. Keep in mind that most modern carpeting is made of nylon and should not be treated with bleach.
- Vacuum again.
- Here's a way you can reduce a musty smell:
 1. Sprinkle baking soda over the carpet, working it in with a broom or sponge mop.
 2. Leave the baking soda in the carpet overnight.
 3. Vacuum the baking soda out. Vacuum twice, moving back and forth in a different direction the second time.

Additional Resources

- Your county Extension agents
- Your local emergency government office
- The American Red Cross
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)