

Home Clean-Up and Sanitation

SAFELY CLEANING A FLOOD-DAMAGED HOME

Clean-up priorities will vary depending upon the kind and seriousness of damage to your home. But assuming major concerns such as structural safety, basement flooding, and electrical and water systems have been addressed, clean-up can begin inside.

Start cleaning your furnishings as soon as possible. Your aim should be to thoroughly dry and clean the house before trying to live in it or have permanent repairs made. Early efforts should include taking furniture, rugs, bedding and clothing outside to dry and prevent mildew.

SET PRIORITIES AND KEEP SAFETY IN MIND

As you begin clean-up, focus on accomplishing the most important tasks first. Resist over-exerting yourself.

- ◆ Give special attention to cleaning children's toys, cribs, playpens and play equipment. Boil any items a toddler or baby might put in his or her mouth. Discard stuffed toys, water-logged toys and non-cleanable items.
- ◆ Keep chemicals used for disinfecting and poisons used for insect and rodent control out of children's reach.
- ◆ Wear protective clothing on legs, arms, feet and hands while cleaning up debris.

GENERAL RULES FOR CLEANING AND DISINFECTING

- ◆ Wash exposed skin frequently in purified water. Wear rubber gloves to protect against contamination and skin irritation.
- ◆ Try using a pump-up garden sprayer or hose to remove layers of mud from hard surfaces.
- ◆ Scrub with a household cleaner/detergent solution and a brush to remove remaining surface oil. Rinse with clean water.
- ◆ Wash with a disinfectant, such as chlorine bleach, pine oil or a phenolic product, such as Lysol. Remember, a product is considered to be a "disinfectant" only if it is labeled as such. Rinse well.
- ◆ Dry items thoroughly to prevent mildew growth.
- ◆ Sanitize dishes, cooking utensils and food preparation areas before using them (see fact sheet, "Disinfecting Dishes, Cookware and Utensils").

REMOVING MOLD AND MILDEW

- ◆ Brush off mold and mildew growth on household items outdoors to prevent scattering of spores in the house.
- ◆ Vacuum floors, ceilings and walls to remove mildew. Then wash surfaces with a detergent/household cleaner and water solution.

- ◆ Wipe mildew-stained areas with a cloth dampened with a solution of 1 cup of chlorine bleach or rubbing or denatured alcohol to 1 gallon water. Pine-based or phenolic products also work well.

PREVENTING MILDEW GROWTH

- ◆ Use an air conditioner, dehumidifier or heater, if available, to remove moisture. Use fans to circulate air and open all windows.
- ◆ Turn on electric lights in closets and leave doors open to dry the dampness and humidity.
- ◆ Spray with a fungicide or other mildew preventive product. Read and follow instructions and precautions on product label. Dry thoroughly.

Additional resources:

Your county family living agent, your local emergency government office, the American Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency

Related publications:

"Repairing Your Flooded Home," the American Red Cross/Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1992.