



Flood Cleanup and Home Repair

Follow these steps to safely clean up and prevent water damage after a flood.

Before re-entering your home:

- Wait for the water to go down.
- Walk carefully around the outside of your home and check for damaged power lines and gas leaks. Call your utility company to report downed power lines or gas leaks.
- Check for structural damage.
- Refer to the Red Cross's *Checking Utilities and Major Systems* to safely turn off electricity (www.redcross.org).
- Air out building to remove escaping gases.

Wear the right gear:

- Be sure to wear proper gear that will prevent you from coming in contact with floodwaters or sewage: rubber boots, waterproof gloves, and an N95 mask. See *How to Use an N95 Mask* (www.health.ny.gov/FloodHelp).

Remove standing water:

- **No oil:** Standing water should be removed as quickly as possible. Water can wick into the walls causing more damage. Standing water can contain bacteria and mold that can cause health problems.
- **Oil:** Do not remove standing water if there is fuel oil floating on top of the water in a flooded basement. The oil should be cleaned up before the water is pumped out. Environmental contractors have special equipment to contain and collect the spilled oil. See *What Homeowners Need to Know about Fuel Oil Spills and Flooding* (www.health.ny.gov/FloodHelp).

Remove items soaked by floodwaters or sewage promptly: Discarding items, particularly those with sentimental value, can be difficult. However, water-soaked items can grow mold and bacteria that can affect your health. In general, do not try to save moldy, porous items (items that absorb water).

These items need to be discarded when you see or smell mold and/or the materials have been underwater:

- Wallboard, insulation, wood paneling and wallpaper
- Carpet, carpet padding, and rugs
- Upholstered furniture, mattresses, and box springs
- Computers, microwaves, window air conditioners, and other electronics and appliances that had fans and were housed in moldy rooms
- Papers and books
- Food items, including canned foods that were in contact with floodwaters

These items can usually be saved:

- Nonporous items like china, glass, jewelry, porcelain, and metal
- Solid wood furniture with mold growth but otherwise in good condition
- Photographs, books, and valuable or important legal documents with minor levels of mold growth
- Artwork, textiles, and clothing that are not physically damaged

Clean items soaked by floodwaters or sewage promptly:

- Wash walls, floors, closets, shelves, and any hard surface with soap and water.
- Then, to kill germs, clean with a mix of one cup of regular bleach in five gallons of water. Use unscented bleach. Let surfaces air dry.
- Carefully clean surfaces that touch food or that are in children's play areas.
- Never mix bleach with ammonia or other cleaners. Mixing them can release a poisonous gas.
- Whatever cleaning products you use, make sure to follow label directions.
- Wash all linens and clothing in hot water.
- Wash and air dry larger items outdoors in the sun.
- Replace disposable filters in your heating/cooling system and any wet fiberboard and insulation.
- Clean heating and air conditioning ducts that have been flooded.

Ventilate and lower the humidity:

- Open doors and windows during the day if weather permits. Make sure fresh air is entering if you are cleaning with bleach.
- Open closet and cabinet doors.
- If the power is on, use fans and dehumidifiers to dry out your home. (Do not use central air or the furnace blower if the ducts were underwater. Have your heating and ventilation systems professionally inspected.)

Sort items: List the damage and take photos or video as you clean up so you will have a complete record. They will be needed for insurance claims, applications for disaster assistance, and income tax deductions.

- Items you need to save: move to a safe, dry place.
- Items that need to be discarded: place outside to dry until the adjuster comes to confirm your losses.

For more information on what to save and what to discard, see the *Disaster Recovery Information Frequently Asked Questions* (www.health.ny.gov/FloodHelp).

Discard garbage: Local authorities will tell you where and when collection will occur.

- Store food waste in watertight, rodent- and insect- proof containers with tight-fitting covers.
- Use plastic liners.
- Pile in a convenient location away from your well.
- Flood damaged, hazardous household materials (pesticides, fertilizers, paints, varnishes) should be placed in a leak-proof container and removed from the home for proper disposal.

Report health hazards: Tell your local health department about animal carcasses, rats, hazardous chemicals, and physical hazards on your property.

Wash your hands with soap and clean water, or water that has been boiled or disinfected after flood cleanup, when you take breaks, before eating or drinking, and after handling articles contaminated with floodwater or sewage.

Septic systems and drinking water: For homes with septic systems: If floodwaters are covering your septic tank or if your plumbing is functioning sluggishly:

- Do not use any toilets or washing machines.
- Conserve water as much as possible. The less water used, the less sewage the septic tank must process.
- Do not have the septic tank pumped. A high groundwater level might crush a septic tank that is pumped dry.
- Do not have the septic tank and drainfield repaired until the ground has dried. Often systems are completely functional when water levels go down. Repairs may require a permit and inspection by your local health department. A professional engineer can also advise you.

If your private drinking water well has been covered with floodwaters, it should be disinfected. See *Restoring and Testing Your Private Well After a Flood* (www.health.ny.gov/FloodHelp).

If your area was under a Boil Water Notice, see *Boil Water Notices – Fact Sheet and Templates for Public Drinking Water* (www.health.ny.gov/FloodHelp).

Other Related Publications

Carbon Monoxide: Know the Hazards

Carbon Monoxide: The Silent Killer

What Homeowners Need to Know
about Fuel Oil Spills and Flooding

Drinking Water and Food Guidance After a Flood

Don't be Left in the Dark

Flooding Quick Reference Guide

Checklist and Resources for Repairing Your Flooded Home

How to Avoid Getting Sick and Injured After a Flood

How to Use an N95 Mask

Mold and Your Home: What You Need to Know

Restoring and Testing Your Private Well After a Flood



Department
of Health