



Cooperative Extension Service

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Flood Recovery – Where Do I Start?

When flooding occurs and homes suffer flood damage, where do you start? It often appears to be an overwhelming task, especially when you are unsure of the first step to take. Where to start and where to get information are the two biggest questions. The Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) recommends breaking it down to four steps.

First, account for your family and help others around you. If you know your family and your friends are safe, it is easier to take the next step of assessing property damage. Be sure to use safety precautions when assessing the damage. Check to see that electricity and gas lines are off. Walkways and flooring can become slippery and/or uneven after flooding.

The next step is often ignored, but essential in maintaining the health of your family. Be sure you and your family are eating properly and getting enough sleep. It's hard enough dealing with all the devastation without adding more to the stress levels. Check with your health officials about getting a tetanus shot. Getting a cut or abrasion during cleanup can cause exposure to bacteria present in the flood waters. And don't cut short the therapeutic effects of talking to someone about your losses. The same for your family.

The last step is giving your home first aid. Any wallboard and insulation which has been exposed to flood waters, should be removed and replaced due to the risk of bacterial contamination and mold growth. Cleaning everything is imperative to prevent future problems.

Carpets and flooring may require professional cleaners. Many times though, they are "swamped", during a disaster --no pun intended. However, there are some steps you can take. Be sure to clean and dry floors thoroughly before attempting any repairs. Pull up saturated carpets and rugs, and drape them outside. Spray off the muddy carpets with a hose and use a broom and low-sudsing, disinfectant carpet cleaner to clean the soiled areas. To discourage mildew, rinse the backing with a solution of 2 tablespoons of bleach to 1 gallon of water. Do not use this solution on wool carpets. For wool carpets, try using pine-oil cleaners. Disinfect the slab or subfloor, allowing it to dry completely, which could take several months, depending on the humidity. Discard and replace all the carpet padding.

Take time to determine what can be salvaged and what should be thrown. Many things can survive a flood, so evaluate the extent of the damage, the cost of the article, the cost of restoration, the quality of the wood or fabric, and the sentimental value. Always wear rubber gloves and wash hands frequently when working with cleaning solutions and flood-damaged items. Warning.....never mix chlorine and ammonia based cleaning products.

Furniture which has been flooded and has porous materials such as leather, fabric and stuffing is contaminated. It should be discarded because it will likely produce dangerous molds in your home later. Other furniture should be taken outside and remove as many drawers and removable parts as possible. Clean off mud and dirt, using a hose if necessary and re-glue areas after it is completely dry.

Appliances submerged in flood water are often not repairable, and even those that are repaired will have a shortened life expectancy. Economics guide the replacement of small appliances such as microwaves, televisions, and radio. The cost of repair is more than replacement.

With regard to family keepsakes, the rule is to start salvage early because mold can take over within 48 hours. Photos are the hardest to lose, so check the condition and see if they can be saved. Remove them from frames or enclosures and carefully rinse with cool, clean water as necessary....do not blot or touch the surfaces. Air-dry by hanging them with clips attached to the edges or lay them flat on an absorbent paper without touching other photos. If there are too many for immediate attention, keep the photos in a container of clean water for no more than 48 hours. If you need more time, you can freeze them. It works best to insert freezer or waxed paper between each photo before freezing.

For more information about flood cleanup, ask any University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension office. Call Lander at 332-2363, Riverton at 857-3654 or the Wind River Reservation at 332-2135.

Source: Patti Griffith, University of Wyoming Extension Educator for Nutrition and Food Safety



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