



## FLOOD CLEANUP: KEEP IN MIND INDOOR AIR QUALITY

After a flood, it's important to restore your home to good order as soon as possible to protect your health and prevent further damage to your house and belongings. In an emergency situation, the indoor air quality in your home may appear to be the least of your problems. However, failure to remove standing water or water damaged materials can present serious long-term health risks. Standing water and wet materials will allow viruses, bacteria, and mould to grow. These organisms can cause disease, trigger allergic reactions, and continue to damage materials long after the flood.

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**IMMEDIATE ACTION IS IMPORTANT. YOUR HOUSE AND FURNISHINGS ARE LESS LIKELY TO GROW MOULD IF THEY ARE DRIED WITHIN 48 HOURS.**

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### Before you begin

**Put your own safety first. Avoid electrical shock. Wear rubber boots at all times while standing in water. Keep extension cords out of the water.** Shut the power off to the flooded area at the breaker box. Ask your local electrical utility for help if needed.

Determine if the flood involves relatively clean water or sewage-contaminated water. You must take special precautions if your house is flooded with sewage. There is a very real and significant danger of infection from breathing the air in an area contaminated by sewage and from handling water and materials contaminated by sewage. Children, pregnant women and people with respiratory problems should never handle water and materials contaminated by sewage. Household items that have been contaminated by sewage, or that have been wet for a long time, may have to be bagged, tagged and discarded according to local regulations. Contact your local public health department if you suspect sewage contamination. A more thorough disinfection procedure will be needed, as well as greater precaution to avoid exposure of family members and pets.

Whether you do the cleanup yourself or hire a contractor, this document will help you get organized.

Set up a step-by-step action plan to:

- prepare for the cleanup
- remove water, mud and other debris
- dispose of contaminated household goods
- clean and dry out your house and salvageable possessions.

Prepare for the cleanup. Assemble equipment and supplies:

- disposable gloves, N95 mask, goggles
- pails, mops, sponges and plastic garbage bags
- unscented detergent (Note: Bleach is not necessary to cleanup mould)
- where possible open windows and doors to provide fresh air

- you may need to rent extension cords, submersible pumps, wet/dry shop vacuums and dehumidifiers
1. Remove water, mud and other debris
    - Remove standing water with pumps or pails, then with a wet/dry shop vacuum.
    - Remove all soaked and dirty materials, debris, residual mud and soil.
    - Clean any dirt on walls and furnishings with an unscented soap solution, removing the remaining water with a wet/dry shop vacuum. Then clean all floors as quickly as possible.
  2. Dispose of contaminated household items that cannot be dried
    - Flooring that has been soaked by flood water should be removed and discarded.
    - Remove finished walls completely if: the water level was several feet high; it took many days or longer before the water was drained; or the area was very humid for an extended period.
    - Dispose of all insulation materials, drywall, carpets, particleboard furniture, mattresses, box springs, stuffed toys, pillows, cushions and furniture coverings that have been exposed to flood water and cannot be dried (see *Addressing Moisture and Mould in Your Home* for more details).
    - Identify the materials that may be kept and which should be given priority for cleanup.
  3. Clean and dry out the house and salvageable possessions
    - Surfaces that are dry and/or have not been directly affected by the flood water should be vacuumed with a HEPA vacuum cleaner.
    - After cleaning the surfaces with an unscented soap solution, ventilate or dehumidify the house until it is dry.
    - Rapid drying is important to prevent mould growth. If outside weather permits (low humidity and moderate temperature), open doors and windows and speed up the drying process with fans.
    - If the outside weather is not suitable or the drying is slow, use a dehumidifier.

### Avoid Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide is a colourless, odourless gas that can be lethal at high levels. It can build up quickly if, for example, pumps or heaters powered by gasoline, kerosene, or propane, are used in a poorly ventilated room. Do not use combustion equipment designed for outdoor use indoors.

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**MAKE SURE THERE IS A WORKING CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTOR, ESPECIALLY WHEN DRYING OUT YOUR HOUSE.**

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For more information, contact us by phone at (613) 957-1876, by email at [air@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:air@hc-sc.gc.ca) or go to <http://www.getprepared.gc.ca/cnt/hzd/flds-eng.aspx>.