



FACT SHEET: Cleaning Up After Floods/Sewer Back Ups

Proper responses to sewer backups can greatly minimize losses from negative health effects and property damage. Every backup is unique and will require different responses but there are some universal principles that can be applied to all situations. Prompt cleanup of affected property can help minimize the inconvenience and damage. The City recommends that you immediately arrange for a thorough, professional, sanitized clean up of your affected property. Check the yellow pages under "Fire and Water Damage Restoration". The City cannot recommend contractors.

If you choose to clean up your property yourself, the following information is provided as a recommendation to assist you with your clean up efforts. The City does not assume any liability for actions taken during the clean-up process.

Additionally you may want to review the Vermont Department of Health's guidance on this issue http://healthvermont.gov/news/2011/060111_flood_contaminated_water.aspx

Health and Safety Issues

Please be aware and keep in mind the risk of potential health and safety problems when addressing the cleanup of your home. If the flooding in your property was the result of flow that came out of any of pipe or plumbing fixture in your home, it will contain some amount of sanitary sewage, likely mixed with the stormwater which caused it to back flow through un-protected fixtures. Even if you are relatively certain that your basement flooding was the result of surface water, you should still follow these cautionary guidelines when cleaning up. Sewage and floodwaters contains bacteria, fecal material, viruses and other hazardous microorganisms, which can cause disease. These "germs" can be transmitted by touching contaminated items or by tracking them into uncontaminated areas on shoes. Children and pets are especially vulnerable. Odors from sewage backups are unpleasant but not harmful. The speedy removal and cleanup of sewer water is very important and necessary.

- Avoid skin contact with sewer water, especially cuts and sores. Keep them clean and covered.
- If you should suffer a cut while working in flood or sewer water, contact your physician about receiving a tetanus shot.
- Do not allow children to play in areas contaminated by sewage backup.
- Do not eat or drink anything exposed to sewer water.
- Keep contaminated objects, water, and hands away from mucous membranes (mouth, eyes, and nose).
- Wash hands frequently, before eating, and immediately following contact with sewer water or contaminated objects/surfaces.
- Disinfect all areas and equipment that came into floodwater contact with a solution of 8 tablespoons of liquid chlorine bleach to a gallon of water. This is a very effective method of removing odors and bacteria. Bleach solutions are the most effective disinfectants, but may cause discoloration of many materials.



Do not mix cleaning products together or add bleach to other chemicals. Certain combinations can produce poisonous gas.



FACT SHEET: Cleaning Up **After** Floods/Sewer Back Ups (Cont'd)

Some Do's and Don'ts of Clean Up

- Keep receipts, lists of discarded items and if possible, photographs for any possible insurance claim.
- Generally small household items that are affected or exposed to the sewage should be discarded.
- Potential health and safety hazards must be identified and eliminated prior to implementing cleaning or restoration procedures. Before entering the affected area the potential for electrical shock hazards and gas leaks must be assessed.
- The cleanup and drying of the basement should occur as quickly as possible to minimize mold and risk of problems.
- Wear protective clothing such as rubber boots, gloves, N-95 respirator/mask (for protection against mold) and eye protection during cleanup and removal. To remove gloves turn them inside out, without touching the contaminated exterior. Dispose of them properly.
- Treat all water soaked surfaces, furnishings and items as contaminated until properly cleaned & sanitized.
- Do not use any electrical equipment while standing in water.
- Wet-vacuum to remove spillage. Operate wet vacuums only when plugged into a ground fault circuit interrupter or ground fault equipped outlet.
- Remove and discard upholstered furniture and porous wood furniture stained by sewage.
- Discard or properly wash and disinfect toys, clothing and other contaminated objects.
- Sanitize and clean hardwood furniture, then thoroughly wipe, dry and apply an oil-based wood polish.
- Ventilate the affected area with floor fans and a dehumidifier, if available, to properly dry the area. If it has not been directly contacted by water, activate the building's heating, ventilation and doors when conditions are favorable.
- Clean appliances and/or ductwork. If electric motors, wiring or insulation have been saturated, have a qualified service technician remove the motor, dry it, and inspect for damage before plugging it back in and turning it on.
- Do not use heat to dry closed building interiors; mildew and expanded water damage may result.
- If your basement walls are finished with drywall, all the areas contacted by water must be removed and disposed of within 24 hours. Once these items get wet, they retain moisture long enough to grow mold. Removing the wallboard also allows air to circulate around the wood studs so that they dry completely and will not need to be replaced.
- Sanitize and repair, or remove and discard, paneling, wallboard or wall coverings.
- Unplug all electrical appliances, small electrical devices on wet floor covering or other wet areas and turn off the circuit breakers supplying the electricity to affected areas.
- Turn off the gas (or other fuel source) to your furnace or heater and hot water heater.
- After the waters have receded, flush out and disinfect plumbing fixtures before resuming normal use.
- Do not track sewage from the basement into living areas of the house.
- Keep children and animals out of the affected area.
- Move any uncontaminated property away from the affected areas.