

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING FLOODED BASEMENTS



Cleanup efforts after a flood must begin as soon as possible, but before you begin your personal safety must be taken into consideration. The most important factor before cleaning up after a flood is electrical safety, watch for electrical shorts and live wires, to prevent electrocution. Secondly, the risk of infection is very real and the dangers are significant. Fecal matter or decayed vegetation is carried by flood waters, thus it is not safe to assume that the air can be breathed or that the water and surfaces can be handled without risk of infection. Ensure you are protected, by wearing personal protection such as rubber boots, rubber gloves and a face mask to limit exposure to the contaminants in the water. Once the clean-up process is over, make sure that all parts of the body that have come in contact with the flood waters are thoroughly washed.

Consequences of Improper Remediation

Molds and other microbes can start to grow on water-damaged materials in a few days after flood waters have receded. Mold contamination can cause significant health problems. These problems include allergic responses such as eye, nose and throat irritation, excessive colds and flu and a lower immune system.

General Clean-up and Disinfection

Drain any flooded areas using a sump or other conventional pump to an area away from the home and septic field if there is an onsite sewage system. Remove all damaged carpeting, furniture,

dishes, wall boards, clothing, bedding, toys etc. and discard unless items can be disinfected. Small refuse should be collected and placed in plastic bags for removal on regular garbage pick-up day. Large items will also be removed at this time. **Any discarded items should not be left accessible to persons who may try to salvage them**

Each article should be labelled:

“DANGER-DISCARDED FLOOD ITEM- DO NOT SALVAGE”

Floors, walls, appliances and any item that can be disinfected should be washed thoroughly with a disinfecting solution of warm water and household chlorine bleach. The water-chlorine mixture is 5 oz of

bleach per 1 gallon of water or 128 ml of bleach per 4 litres of water. Provide as much ventilation as possible to each area that is cleaned to ensure that fumes/vapours do not reach dangerous concentrations. The basement should be thoroughly aired and dried after treatment and before occupancy of the basement. Central air conditioning units should not be operated until the basement is restored for occupancy since air borne contaminants could be dispersed throughout the house.

Once the area has been thoroughly cleaned and restored, contact the local utilities and request that service be restored to the residence if services were interrupted. No attempt should be made to try out or to operate any electrical appliances until the wiring in your home or building has been inspected and found safe.

Foods in Flood Areas

Since foods exposed to flooded water may constitute a health hazard, the following recommendations are intended as a guide in the disposing of such contaminated foods.

Canned Food

Canned food should be closely checked for "leaks" and "swells". Particular attention should be paid to seams and joints for signs or corrosion. Home prepared fruits in jars and sealers, which show evidence of contamination, should be discarded.

Soft Foods

Soft foods, including all kinds of meat and dairy products, should be

discarded if there is any evidence of contact with flood water.

Wrapped Foods

Foods, which have been wrapped in moisture-proof material, should be examined for breaks in the wrapper. If the wrapper is leaking or has been broken, the food should be discarded.

All food stored in refrigerators where the electricity has been off for more than 8 hours or where flood waters have risen above the door opening, should be discarded. Frequent opening of the refrigerator door greatly reduces this time. Should flood water enter a freezer unit, all food products in the freezer should be discarded.

IF IN DOUBT- THROW IT OUT!

All discarded food and food containers should be placed in properly covered receptacles and labelled as:

"DANGER CONTAMINATED PRODUCT DO NOT USE"

NOTE: Any food container that can be washed should be washed thoroughly and immersed in a chlorine/water solution of 5 oz. of bleach/1 gallon water or 125 ml of bleach/4 L water for 15 minutes.

For more information contact the Health Inspection Department at (519) 258-2146 ext. 1450.