

CLEANING UP AND RENOVATING AFTER YOUR BASEMENT FLOODS. WHAT TO DO?

Trickles of water seeping through your basement wall after a heavy downpour or a couple of inches of water on the floor from a burst pipe may be minor compared to homes completely submerged by floodwaters.

Still, it is estimated that each year, several million home basements experience some water penetration. And, even if the flooding in your basement isn't catastrophic and you feel you can handle the cleanup by yourself, it's important that you assess the situation correctly and take appropriate action to prevent health hazards as well as immediate and long-term damage to your basement and its contents.

Cleanup and restoration professionals offered these basic suggestions for dealing with minor basement flooding:

- First, **find where the water is coming from** and stop the leak.
- Unless the leak is potable water from a burst pipe in the house, the **flood waters should be considered contaminated**. Even rainwater picks up pesticides, lawn chemicals, and other pollutants and care should be taken to limit exposure to it. If you have concerns about proper cleanup, consult a professional or check out one or more of the post-flood cleanup web sites listed on the reverse side.
- **Act quickly** to remove the water and minimize moisture damage and prevent the growth of mold. The longer water stands, the more it penetrates wall and flooring materials. And, with the right combination of temperature and high levels of humidity, mold will begin to grow on exposed surfaces within 24 to 48 hours, said Kevin Trumbull of Trumbull Building & Remodeling in New Hartford, Conn.
- **Determine how far the water has penetrated** by checking floor coverings, walls and furniture. If dampness has begun to wick up your finished walls, it's time to call in the professionals, said contractor Ed Perryman, president of Perryman Consulting & Construction Services, Barrie, Ontario. In such cases, the potential for hidden mold growth is very high and it is essential that a contractor remove sodden sheetrock, dry out the affected areas and install a new sheetrock wall.
- **Remove everything, including furniture, cabinets, exercise equipment and electronics gear from the wet areas** and dry each item. In addition to preventing water damage, removing these items eliminates pockets of moisture that could be trapped underneath, and allows you to pull up your finished floor. If, for some reason, you can't remove something, at least put it up on blocks to keep it away from the dampness and allow air flow underneath to help dry up the moisture. Porous items such as upholstered furniture, carpets and padding that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried should be discarded.
- **Lift up the finished floor** – carpet, laminate, vinyl or wood – and remove any padding or underlayment materials, and the subfloor, if you have one.
- **Dry out the area and clean it thoroughly**. Remove standing water with a special wet vacuum, not a regular household vacuum cleaner, cautioned Marc Bresson, owner of Servicemaster of Milwaukee. Bresson also suggested damp mopping with mild detergent and hot water to kill bacteria and remove mold.
- **Continue the drying-out process by renting large fans and blowers** designed specifically to create adequate air circulation to evaporate the remaining moisture. While it may seem obvious, there are people who forget a basic rule: Don't operate any electrical appliances while standing in water or on wet carpet. Run the dehumidifier. You'll need to reduce the relative humidity to 50 percent or less, at a temperature of 72°F. It's also a good idea to invest in a humidity sensor that will read humidity levels. Use it to monitor the progress of the drying process.

If you have less than 1/4" of water and one of the new modular subfloors, such as DRICore®, you may be able to dry out the basement by removing a few sections of the subfloor and directing the fans and blowers underneath the remaining panels, Perryman said.

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REBUILDING AFTER A FLOOD

Depending upon the type of floor installation and finished floor material you have, and the extent to which it has been exposed to water, you may be able to salvage your flooring materials, dry them thoroughly, clean them and re-install them.

However, if the flooding gives you the excuse you need to embark on a total basement makeover, the contractors point out the following "must-do's" that are frequently overlooked in planning a basement project, but are essential to protecting your investment in your basement.

- **Consider hiring a professional contractor** to restore your basement. These pros are specialists in evaluating water damage and recommending construction solutions that will manage basement moisture, prevent mold growth and foster a healthy living environment. Check the Yellow Pages under "Contractors: Flood Damage Restoration or Water Damage Restoration" or visit one of the web sites below.
- **Install vapor barriers** on concrete walls before putting up drywall and install a moisture barrier on the concrete floor before laying down a new finished floor. One possibility is a modular subfloor system such as DRICore, an all-in-one subfloor and moisture barrier that protects finished floors and furniture from moisture damage. "Some people try to cut corners and eliminate the vapor barrier," Trumbull observed. "Without it, moisture from condensation can infiltrate walls and floors and allow mold to grow unseen in wall cavities."
- **Plan for adequate ventilation and air exchange** to prevent stale, moisture-laden air from accumulating in corners and "dead spaces." Perryman recommended locating heat registers and cold-air returns low on the walls to encourage air movement and evaporation at floor level, where moisture is most likely to accumulate.
- Finally, both Trumbull and Perryman suggested **installing a modular subfloor**, such as DRICore, instead of laying the new finished floor directly over the concrete. The modular subfloor has a built-in moisture barrier that will prevent future small leaks from ruining your basement and its furnishings. Its raised design allows air to circulate between the subfloor and the concrete to help evaporate moisture. It also keeps the finished floor, and your feet, from coming into contact with cold concrete for a warmer, drier floor. And because it is a wood product, this type of subfloor is more comfortable for walking or standing.

FOR INFORMATION ON CLEANING UP AFTER THE FLOOD, CONSULT THESE RESOURCES:

www.epa.gov - "Fact Sheet; Flood Cleanup - Avoiding Indoor Quality Problems"
www.lungusa.org - "Flood Cleanup Fact Sheet"
www.cmhc.ca - "Cleaning Up Your House After a Flood"
www.redcross.org - "Disaster Services/After a Disaster/Floods: Repairing Your Flooded Home"

FOR INFORMATION ON MOLD PREVENTION AND CLEANUP, CONSULT THESE RESOURCES:

www.themoldsources.com
www.ashrae.org - Indoor Air Quality
www.lungusa.org - Indoor Air Quality
www.epa.gov - Indoor Air Quality
www.buildabetterhome.org - Mold
www.iaqcouncil.org - Indoor Air Quality

FOR INFORMATION ON FLOOD DAMAGE, CLEANING AND RESTORATION CONTRACTORS, CONSULT THESE RESOURCES:

www.iicrc.org - The Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification
www.ascr.org - Association of Specialists in Cleaning and Restoration

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