

Cleaning Up Your Flooded Basement



SAFETY FIRST!

So, your basement has been flooded, and now you have a large mess on your hands. You want to get it cleaned up as fast as possible. There are some very important things you need to know before you get to work. It's all for you and your family's safety.

1. Make sure **ALL** the utilities (electricity and gas) are turned **OFF**. Call your local utility companies for help first. **DO NOT** go into a flooded basement with the electricity still on.
2. **KEEP EVERYONE OUT OF THE FLOODED AREA**. This means everyone, especially children and animals. There may be **RAW SEWAGE** in the flood water making it **VERY HAZARDOUS**. Keep children and animals out and away from the basement, until it has been drained, washed, and disinfected.
3. **DO NOT FLUSH TOILETS**. What is in the toilet could end up in the flooded basement.
4. **DO NOT USE WATER FROM A PRIVATE WELL IF IT IS FLOODED** until the water has been tested safe for drinking. Water from flooded areas or from wells in a flooded area is not safe for drinking, cooking or washing of any kind. Get water from a safe place such as a local city (municipality), a well outside of the flooded area, or buy bottled water from a store.

In an emergency and with no other source of safe water available you may use water from a flooded well. You must disinfect the water first. Water may be disinfected by using one of the following methods: Boil the water for at least one (1) minute **OR** add ten (10) drops of household bleach (avoid bleach with fancy scents such as lemon, or fresh scents) to one gallon of water. Let the water solution stand until the bleach smell is gone.

5. **WASH YOUR HANDS** with clean or disinfected, warm or hot water and plenty of soap. In order to prevent disease it is important to wash your hands frequently. Be sure to wash your hands before and after working with babies, small children or food. Remember to wash under your fingernails.
6. **THROW OUT FOOD AND DRINKS** if they have been touched by flood water. If the power has been off for more than 24 hours or if flood waters have gotten into the refrigeration unit and touched the food, throw out all of the food. Carefully examine all canned goods. Cans with ends that are bulged or spring out when pressed should be discarded. Dented cans may be weak and allow flood water to seep in. Throw out all exposed dented cans. **NEVER TASTE FOODS THAT HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO FLOOD WATER**. If you have questions about food in a flooded house **THROW THE FOOD OUT**.

BEFORE GOING INTO THE BASEMENT TO CLEAN IT OUT:

1. Make sure the electricity and gas are turned off.
2. If possible from the outside, open all the windows to the flooded area. This allows any gas build-up to be vented out of the house.
3. Find a flashlight to use in the flooded area. **NEVER** take matches, lighters, or lanterns into the basement. The flooding may have caused gas fumes to build up and the flame could cause an explosion.
4. Find rubber gloves, protective (disposable, if possible) clothing, and waders or boots.
5. Cover all open sores and cuts with an adhesive bandage (Band-Aid, Plastic Steri-Strip, etc.).

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CLEANING UP:

1. Have experienced people turn off any electric and gas utilities.
2. Call your utility companies for help and advice on what to do.
3. Put on protective clothing, head covering if necessary, gloves, and waders or boots.
4. **BE CAREFUL WHEN FIRST ENTERING THE BASEMENT.** Turn a flashlight on before going into the basement to help you see. Hazards such as furniture and floating objects can cause tripping and falling.
5. Make sure that all the windows are open to provide ventilation for those areas that are wet inside.
6. For insurance purposes, it may be a good idea to take pictures or video tape of the entire flooded area.
7. Basement flood waters may be removed through natural drainage or by pumping. Pumping water should be directed away from septic fields, lakes and streams, storm sewers, play areas, and your neighbor's property. Drainage flood water in the septic field could flood your septic system and cause toilets to back up.
8. Remove damaged carpeting, furniture, dishes, wall board, appliances, etc., from the flooded area.
9. Flooded areas must be scrubbed with **HOT** soapy water. Wash all walls up to two feet (24 inches) above the level of where the flood water stopped. Wash all floors. Be sure to **SCRUB** food contact surfaces (counter tops, pantry shelves, refrigerators, stoves, cutting boards, etc.) And areas where children play with **HOT** soapy water. Allow washed surfaces to dry. Discard wash water outside.
10. Next, wash and disinfect all surfaces (floors, walls, counters, etc.) with a solution made of ½ cup household bleach in one gallon of clean water. Allow surfaces to dry. Remember to vent the basement while cleaning up with bleach. There may be fumes from the bleach.
11. Wash all linens and clothing which were exposed to flood water in **HOT** soapy water, or dry clean.
12. If possible, allow upholstered furniture, mattresses, etc., which are in good condition, to dry in the sun. After an article is thoroughly dry, vacuum and spray it with a disinfectant. Steam clean all carpeting. Clothing, toys, furniture, bedding and similar objects should be cleaned and disinfected properly. If items cannot be thoroughly cleaned they should be discarded. **IF IN DOUBT - THROW IT OUT!** The health of you and your family is the most important thing.
13. Once the area has been properly cleaned, inspect all power outlets and replace any that are damaged or damp. Contact the utility companies and request that service be turned back on. Relight all pilot lights for the furnace and hot water tank following manufacturer's directions. Replace furnace filters and air filters.

Remember - these are recommendations! Your local health department is there to help you find answers to questions about health and hygiene during the clean up of a flood in your home, so feel free to call us!

Information taken from Michigan Environmental Health Association Fact Sheet – "Cleaning Up Flooded Basements", December 2001.



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