

Cleaning Up After a Flood

By Diane L. Burnett, M.S. Family & Consumer Sciences Agent and District Director, K-State Research and Extension, Marais des Cygnes District

This summer we have had many folks with flooding either on their land or in their homes and businesses. Floodwaters from an overflowing body of water will likely deposit mud and silt throughout the building and within enclosures, such as electrical appliances, switches, cabinets, etc. This makes through cleanup difficult, since the silt may contain toxins and bio-hazards. Floodwater is considered to be contaminated with biological and chemical contaminants.

Belongs made of Absorbent Materials: As a general rule, soft absorbent materials must be dried out within 48 hours (this period may extend to 72 hours in cooler conditions and may be shortened in warmer temperatures.) This has to do with mold growth. Mold cells reproduce quickly, often doubling in a matter of hours. This process goes faster when temperatures are warmer.

Carpet: Since flood water is contaminated, salvaging flooded carpet involves more than drying. Carpeting can sometimes be saved if it can be cleaned by a professional.

Mattresses: It is unlikely that mattresses can be adequately dried.

Upholstered furniture: It is unlikely that upholstery can be adequately cleaned and dried soon enough. It may be possible to salvage the frame and re-upholster the piece, but first decide if the piece is worth salvaging.

Wood furniture: Solid wood furniture can often be saved if it is not severely damaged. It may be necessary to disassemble and re-glue. Refinishing may also be necessary. Cleaning and drying are essential first steps. Further repairs can be done at a later time. Veneered furniture repairs involve considerable time and skill and are best left to professionals unless damage is slight. Replacement may be the better choice unless the piece has special monetary or sentimental value.

Hard Non-Absorbent Belongings - These can usually be cleaned, dried, and salvaged.
General Rules - Electrical Appliances:

- 1) Be extremely cautious! Plugging in an appliance that has not completely dried can deliver a fatal shock. Opening up some appliances, such as TV sets, can pose a shock hazard even when the device is not plugged in.
- 2) Unplug the appliance before working on it; make sure that power to the house is off before unplugging or touching the appliance. Before power is turned back on, unplug all appliances that have gotten wet. Flooding can cause short circuits that can later deliver a fatal shock.
- 3) Appliances that have been submerged generally cannot be salvaged. It may be possible to repair those that have gotten wet by rainwater but were not flooded.
- 4) Small appliances -- or older, large appliances -- are generally not worth salvaging.
- 5) Electronic appliances -- TV sets, audio equipment, media players and so on -- generally cannot be salvaged.

Restoration of an appliance involves two basic steps: cleaning and drying the device itself and cleaning and drying the motor, switches and controls. Cleaning and drying will be complicated if fibrous insulation (such as fiberglass, found in some stoves, refrigerators, etc.) has gotten wet. Motors and other components will need to be disassembled. All repaired appliances must be tested by a qualified individual before being put back into service.

Here are a couple of links to Extension publications that will give you some detailed guidelines on cleaning up after a flood. Hopefully we will not have the need for this information again this year, but just in case, you might want to save this article for future reference.

This is a 76 page booklet - After the Flood from Univ. of Kentucky Extension...
<http://www2.ca.uky.edu/anr/PDF/After%20the%20Flood%202011.pdf>

Food Safety After a Flood - K-State Extension publication:
<https://www.bookstore.ksre.k-state.edu/pubs/MF3199.pdf>

For further information on this topic, call 913-294-4306 or write to Diane Burnett at dburnett@ksu.edu.