

# TIMELY INFORMATION

## Flood Recovery

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### Fixing Flood Damage

Flooding can cause a lot more than simply water damage: buildings and their contents that have been wet for more than a day or so will start to become moldy. Floodwaters often deposit mud and frequently, depending on the nature of the flooding, raw sewage, chemicals and other contaminants. Floodwaters and the residues left behind can be a major threat to human health, especially for the very young, the elderly, and those weakened by disease or illness.

**OBJECTIVE:** The purpose of this publication is to outline the basic things you need to know in dealing with a home and possessions after a flood.

*If the home has survived the flood, but has remained wet for a long period of time – weeks, or even days, depending on temperature, mold growth in the building may be so widespread that a proper cleanup, damage repair and restoration, may be too expensive and the house will need to be demolished. Usually, if the cost of restoration exceeds more than half the value of your home, it is not practical to save the house. Insurance companies have their guidelines as well.*

### What is the First Thing I Should Do?

#### Documenting the damage:

- **Take pictures** and, if possible, have an inspection by your insurance representative. It may also be wise to hire a claims adjuster to represent you in negotiations with the insurance company. These are listed in the yellow pages under “Adjusters.”
- **Get rid of standing water as soon as possible.** Flooded basements may need to be drained (pumped) gradually over several days to prevent collapse if the soil is also saturated. Mud and sediment need to be removed.
- **Mold needs to be removed. Note: Killing mold with dilute bleach is not sufficient since mold spores and debris can still be harmful even after bleach treatment. Soap and water is usually used for removal. Work with large infestations of mold is best left to trained professionals because of health risks to workers and occupants. Occupants should not be present during such work. Worker protections include gloves, goggles and a good mask or respirator. Masks should have the N 95 designation, usually printed on the mask, and be tightly fitted to the face. Simple dust masks do not provide sufficient protection.**
- **Dry out the building. The building and its contents will need to be dried out. This will usually require active drying – this means using fan, usually together with heat, dehumidification or desiccant drying, and usually means using professional**

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**equipment. The use of fans alone may be of help on warm, dry days but most of the time, they must be combined with some of the measures mentioned above. When saturated drywall or plaster has been removed, inner wall components including insulation materials must be totally dry (best measured with a moisture meter) before the wall is closed up, so mold does not re-grow.**

*Because of the health risks posed by the bacteria and molds in mud, silt and moldy surfaces, personal protection is essential for anyone working around this contamination. People with allergies and asthma who are sensitive to mold should stay away from moldy areas and not attempt to clean up mold.*

### **What Can Be Cleaned?**

- **Hard surfaces – wood, glass, metal, tile, etc. can generally be cleaned of mold and other residues. When cleaning, the mold should also be removed because dead mold spores also cause health problems.**
- **Soft and/or porous surfaces - rugs, fabrics, carpet/carpet pad, and porous materials might be able to be salvaged if they can be dried out within 48 hours (after this time, mold will invade & cleaning will not be possible.) Materials which can absorb moisture, such as drywall, ceiling tiles, paper products, fiberglass, books and papers, may need to be thrown out. Mud, silt, raw sewage, chemicals and petroleum products may make it impossible or impractical to salvage some soft and porous materials and items.**

**Important:** If the items are contaminated by sewage, it is best to **call a professional** who has experience cleaning up mold. Check the references of anyone you hire to help you because cleaning procedures must provide adequate protections for worker health, and occupant health must be safeguarded as well. Floodwaters arising from overflowing seawater, rivers or streams is known as ‘category 3’ water or ‘blackwater’. It is considered to be contaminated with sewage and other biological hazards (dead animals, chemicals, etc.) and poses a serious risk to health. This risk becomes worse with time as its biological hazards multiply. Cleanup after blackwater contamination includes disinfecting soiled surfaces and materials, in addition to removing contaminants.

### **How Do I Hire a Professional to Clean Up Mold?**

Under the best of situations, hiring mold professionals can be a difficult task, with some unqualified persons entering the business. There is little regulation of the mold industry, but lots of opportunities to pay a fee, take a course and get a certificate. Here are some tips to help you hire qualified professionals:

- Learn as much as you can about fixing mold problems before interviewing professional mold contractors. Ask questions. See if the answers make sense. Visit Web sites: [www.epa.gov/mold](http://www.epa.gov/mold) and [www.cdc.gov/mold](http://www.cdc.gov/mold)
- Ask friends & neighbors for recommendations.
- Local and state health departments & building departments may have lists of qualified professionals. In Alabama, call 1-800-819-7644.

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The Alabama Cooperative Extension System offers educational programs, materials, and equal opportunity employment to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability.

- Ask how many mold remediation jobs the contractor has done in previous months. Ask for references; check them.
- Consider hiring a mold investigator, separate from the remediation contractor, who will evaluate your situation and develop a 'scope of work' for fixing the problem. This will allow for competitive bids on the same cleanup protocol.

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