Salvaging Clothing

Floodwater may be contaminated, so it is important to thoroughly clean and disinfect flood-soiled clothing to kill harmful bacteria. Prompt attention may save much of your clothing that has been damaged by floodwaters. If possible, do not let the floodwater and mud dry in shoes or garments.

Washable Garments

1. Check the care label to make sure garments are washable.
2. If labeled hand washable only, then hand wash. Do not put into the washing machine.
3. If garment is dry, brush off loose dirt and residue.
4. Rinse in clean, cool water to remove mud and floodwater. It takes several rinses until rinse water is clear.
5. Work a heavy-duty detergent (liquid) or paste of granule detergent into all stained areas. Let stand 30 minutes.
6. Follow care labels and wash with detergent in the hottest water safe for garment. Use bleach if recommended for garment.
7. Sanitize with a disinfectant. Always test on a hidden seam to be sure it does not harm the garment. Add to washing machine before adding clothing. Here are some disinfectants to try:
   • Liquid chlorine bleach if safe. Do not use on washable wools and silks. Follow directions carefully.
   • Pine oil is safe for most washable garments. Do not use on washable wools and silks, since the odor will remain.
   • Phenolic is safe for most washable garments. Do not use on washable wools and silks, since the odor will remain.
8. Hang garments to dry.

Dry-Cleanable Clothing

Take to the dry cleaner as soon as possible. Shake and brush well to remove as much dirt as possible. Give the dry cleaner as much information as possible about what caused the damage and the fiber content of the fabric, if you know it.

When dry cleaning service is not available, take the following steps:

Garments Still Damp with Muddy Water

1. Rinse in cold water to remove water-soluble, clay-type soil. Rinse garment as quickly as possible to avoid bleeding of dyes and to lessen shrinkage.
2. Gently squeeze out water and shake out wrinkles. Rolling in dry towels helps remove extra water.

3. Place garment on hanger and dry in cool air, or smooth it out on flat surface to dry.

Partly Wet Garments
1. Try to rinse out the wet portion without dipping the entire garment in cold water. If you can’t do this without leaving a strong stain line, dip the entire garment.
2. Shake out wrinkles and dry in cool air.

Dry Garments with Soil in Them
The soil may be difficult to remove. Shake well to remove as much soil as possible before sending to the dry cleaner.

Wet Garments But Not Soiled
Dry in cool air to prevent mildew and transfer of dye.

Mildew
1. Go outside to brush off garment.
2. Rub liquid (or paste of granular) detergent into stain.
3. Launder using detergent and bleach (follow care label) and hottest water safe for fabric. Some mildew may be too severe to be removed.

Leather and Suede Garments and Accessories
Allow leather and suede garments, shoes, belts, and handbags to dry away from direct heat. Then do the following:
1. Brush off as much mud as possible.
2. Use mild soapsuds and cool water to wipe off remaining dirt.
3. Rinse with clean water and wipe gently with clean cloth until you remove all dirt. Do not get the leather or suede too wet while cleaning.
4. Stuff shoes, handbags, and sleeves with paper so they will hold their shape.
5. Dry away from sun and heat.
6. Clean with saddle soap.
7. Use an oil for leather or suede to soften and prevent stiffening. This oil may darken the leather, so check before using.
8. Use a suede brush to restore its original appearance. Brush in only one direction.

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