

## After The Storm: What To Do When You Go Back To A Flooded, Moldy Home

### Do Not Go In

**unless you can be sure that there are no electrical hazards.**

Call a qualified electrician if you have questions. Make sure there are no wet power cords, wiring, outlets, or switches.

No electrical appliances should be standing in water.

**Water + Electricity Can Kill You!**

### Do Not Go In

**if you smell natural gas, or if there is leaking fuel.**

This includes liquid propane (LP), gasoline, home heating oil, or kerosene.

Do Not Smoke. Do Not Use Candles or Oil Lamps, Turn on Light Switches, or Cause a Spark. Call a qualified electrician if you have questions.

**These actions can cause an explosion!**

If your home has sustained significant water damage after a hurricane, tornado, or tropical storm, the large amounts of water will likely result in mold growth in your home. Mold exposure can trigger asthma attacks and is associated with other breathing symptoms and diseases. Here are some things you should do as soon as it is safe to re-enter your home.

As soon as it is safe to go in, take a look around, assess what needs to be done, and decide what you can do yourself, and what will require help from professionals. Most tasks will fall into one or more of these categories:

Water Removal

Throwing Out

Cleaning

Mold Removal

# Here Are Some Things That Should Be Done ASAP

## Water Removal

The faster you can dry things out, the easier it will be to deal with the mold.

- Remove as much standing water as you can. You can use a wet vac (shop vac), buckets, or hand bilge pump (check sporting goods or marine stores). Turn on your sump pump if you have one.
- Turn on your dehumidifier. Consider buying one if you don't already have one.
- After the water is gone, use fans to dry out the area. Open windows and doors if it is not raining or excessively humid outside.
- If you use towels & such, wash them and either put them in a hot clothes dryer or hang them outside to dry.
- If carpeting has been wet for two days or more, it will most likely have to be thrown out, along with any padding underneath. If you can get it completely dry within a day or two after the flood, you might be able to save it. You will need to hire a water restoration contractor with special equipment to dry it thoroughly.

## Throw It Out

- All porous items must be thrown out if they come in contact with sewage.
- Throw out wet furnace or air filters, cardboard boxes, and all porous items that can't be washed clean and thoroughly dried quickly. Throw out moldy wallboard, ceiling tiles, and wet insulation.
- When in doubt, throw it out!

## Cleaning

**Note:** If you have asthma, other breathing problems, cancer, or a weakened immune system, do not do the cleaning yourself. Get someone else to do it.

### Cleaning Hard Surfaces

- Put on rubber gloves (like dishwashing gloves) rubber boots, goggles, and a respirator or mask that says on it, "N-95, NIOSH Approved". These are available in most hardware stores. Be sure to use both head straps and pinch the nose clip to fit your face.
- Get two buckets- one for dirty wash water, and one for clean rinse water.
- Use cloths or paper towels with soap and water or detergent and water to scrub dirt and debris off of hard surfaces. Don't forget to scrub down walls and floors. Do not skip this soap/detergent and water step.
- After cleaning with soap/detergent and water, if you want to sanitize the area with a weak bleach solution, you can use household bleach to mix up a solution of 1 part bleach + 9 parts clean water. Do not make the bleach solution stronger. A weak solution will work fine if the area was cleaned with soap and water first. **Never mix bleach with ammonia.** It can form a poisonous gas.

### Cleaning Soft (Porous) Items

- Wash bed linens and clothes in hot water and dry in a hot clothes dryer. Alternatively, you can try dry cleaning clothes.
- If a water restoration contractor has been able to salvage your carpet, it will probably need to be cleaned. Hire a commercial carpet cleaning company to steam clean it with hot water. Make sure they can extract all of the water, and it is dry before they leave. If it starts to smell moldy within a few days, it will have to be thrown out.

Upholstered furniture, mattresses and other stuffed items will probably have to be thrown out if they've been wet for two days or more. You can try to steam clean them, extract all of the water and leave them baking in the sun for a few days. However, if they starts to smell moldy within a few days, these items will have to be thrown out.

## Cleaning, continued

- If flood water gets inside of heating or cooling ducts, have those units professionally cleaned. Throw out filters and duct liners that have gotten wet.

## Mold Removal

If you see or smell mold, there is no need to have it tested. It does not matter what kind of mold it is - remove it! For more information, see **Testing Should Not Be The First Move**, on the CT DPH website (<http://www.ct.gov/dph/mold>).

If a small moldy area needs to be cleaned up (less than a 3 ft by 3 ft area), you may choose to do the work yourself if you do not have asthma, cancer, or other conditions that cause a weakened immune system. Please see the CT DPH website for directions about how to do it safely yourself (<http://www.ct.gov/dph/mold>). There is another document on the CT DPH website called **Get The Mold Out**. This document explains how to decide whether to tackle mold removal yourself, or whether to call in a professional. It also tells you how to find and check out a contractor.

Large scale mold removal should be performed by a professional contractor experienced in mold removal. To be sure that the job is done safely, make sure your contractor follows the **Connecticut Guidelines for Mold Abatement Contractors** (<http://www.ct.gov/dph/mold>). Note that there is no state enforcement, but clients can require that these guidelines be followed as a condition of payment.

## A Note About Walls

Most walls in North American homes are made with sheet rock (also called wallboard, drywall, or gypsum board). If it has been saturated with water, it will probably need to be removed and thrown out. Most of the time, it is worth hiring a contractor to do the removal and replacement if the area is larger than 3 feet by 3 feet. If the flood left a water line, have the contractor cut out the wet part plus 12- 24 inches above the water line. Sheet rock typically comes in 4 foot by 8 foot sheets. From a practical standpoint, it may be less labor-intensive to use a half or whole sheet than to patch a number of

smaller areas. While the wall is open, remove and replace insulation if it is damp.

Before installing new sheet rock, the wall cavity needs to dry out. The exposed wood framing (studs) should have a moisture content of less than 16 % before attaching new sheet rock. This can be checked with a moisture meter. Attaching new sheet rock to damp studs will result in mold growth behind the wall.

## Final Notes

Before beginning any work that includes disturbing or removing building materials, it is important to find out whether the materials contain asbestos. You will need to hire an asbestos consultant who is licensed by the Connecticut Department of Public Health to make this determination.

Lastly, all home improvement contractors must be registered with the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection (CT DCP). This includes abatement contractors, roofers, driveway pavers, and persons who install fences, siding, gutters, insulation, windows, masonry and underground fuel storage tanks. In addition, plumbers, heating and ventilation workers, sheet metal workers, electricians and many other professionals require a current Connecticut license in order to practice their craft. If you have further questions, go to the CT DCP website: <http://www.ct.gov/dcp> or call 860-713-6110 or 1-800-842-2649.

Contractors should also carry liability insurance and must be able to produce an insurance certificate as proof.

### For More Information, call:

- Your Local Health Department
- The Connecticut Department of Public Health, Environmental and Occupational Health Assessment Program  
860-509-7740

### **Visit the CT DPH Website**

<http://www.ct.gov/dph/mold>

<http://www.ct.gov/dph/ieq>