EXTREME WEATHER

Priorities for Clean-up and Repair After a Flood

The following guidelines will help you get your home back to livable standards as soon as possible. The first priority is your safety. For instance, buildings may not be habitable during the cleaning process. Before entering the house, shut off the gas. Also, to avoid electrical shock, shut the power off to flooded areas and wear rubber boots. Wear waterproof gloves when handling flood contaminated materials. Finally, before you get started, assemble an essential first aid kit for minor injuries that may occur while cleaning.

- Start by taking photos or a video for insurance claims and tax deductions. Keep records of all expenses. Books and papers may be frozen until you have time to work with them. Place waxed paper between layers and place items inside plastic bags before freezing.

- Next, examine the building’s structure. Check the foundation for settling, cracking or undermining. Examine walls, floors and windows. Have an electrician check the electrical system. If the basement is flooded, pump the water out in stages, about 1/3 each day.

- If you have a well you may need to disinfect it.

- Your plan of action for the clean up process starts with removal of standing water. Use pails or pumps, then vacuum with a wet/dry shop vacuum cleaner.

- Remove all soaked and contaminated materials. Place in plastic garbage bags and haul them outside. They may need to be tagged and discarded according to local regulations if they’ve been contaminated with sewer water.

- Shovel out mud and silt before it dries. If the walls are salvageable, hose down walls and floors before they dry. Rinse several times, then clean and disinfect them. Start at the bottom and work upward using chlorine bleach. Do not mix bleach with ammonia; the fumes are toxic.

- The heating system may need to be cleaned, dried and reconditioned. Turning the heat on will help the drying process. You may want to also use a dehumidifier.

- Dry out the walls and floors. This process may take several months. For more information, see online Extension articles “Flooded Walls — Drying and Cleaning” at www.extension.umn.edu/go/1059 and “Flooded Floors and Woodwork — Cleaning” at www.extension.umn.edu/go/1060 .

- Treat items for mildew if necessary.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

www.extension.umn.edu/flood
Fact sheets and videos with research-based tips on immediate and long-term flood issues

Flood Information Line: 1-800-232-9077, fil@umn.edu
For questions about water, crops, horticulture, and climatology issues

AnswerLine: 1-800-854-1678, answer@iastate.edu
For questions about cleaning, stains, mildew, and food safety issues

Source: Diane Corrin; Reviewed by Barb Liukkonen, University of Minnesota Extension 3/20/09