

# *Guidelines for Cleaning Up After a Flood*



## **After a Flood**

If your home has been involved in a flood, be aware that items may be contaminated. This sheet explains how to get up and running again without jeopardizing health or safety.

## **Protect Yourself**

Avoid floodwater touching your skin. Wear waterproof boots and gloves. Floodwater often contains sewage from wastewater treatment plants, septic tanks and farms. Floodwaters also pick up chemicals from roads, parking lots, factories, warehouses, lawns, farms, and storage buildings.

Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly when cleaning up after a flood. Throw away any items that cannot be dried quickly or disinfected.

## **Mold and Mildew**

Clean everything that got wet. Use fans and dehumidifiers to speed the drying process. To prevent mold and mildew growth, try to clean up and dry out the building 24 to 48 hours after flood waters recede. Colonies of mold and mildew fungi usually start developing on surfaces that have remained wet for more than 48 hours.

Molds and mildews can create significant health risks. Accidental swallowing of floodwater can cause stomach or intestinal diseases. Inhaling mold spores may cause breathing problems, allergies, or lung infections. These symptoms can be severe.

If a flooded building is to be reoccupied, floodwater and any contaminants must be removed. Fungus colonies that grew because of the floodwater indoors must be removed. First, open doors and windows. Then clean any surface that was touched by floodwater. Use a solution of one cup bleach in one gallon of water.

## **Furnishings and Clothing**

Discard furnishings and fixtures that came in contact with floodwater if they cannot be washed and disinfected. Examples include:

- Upholstered furniture
- Mattresses and pillows
- Carpeting and rugs
- Books and paper products
- Items containing foam rubber

Clothing and drapes can be washed in clean, hot water containing a sanitizing agent such as bleach or pine oil cleaners. Clothing labeled "Dry Clean Only" may be salvaged by professional dry cleaning.

## **Walls and Ceilings**

If floodwater soaked the sheet rock, insulation, or ceiling, remove 30-inches above the water line

Paneling may be removed and saved, but air must circulate in the wall cavities to dry the studs and sills. Wet wall studs and window sills do not need to be replaced if allowed to dry properly. Flooded portions of studs and sills should be treated with disinfectants such as bleach and water.

## **Floors, Floor Coverings and Hard Surfaces**

Remove any linoleum or tile that has been flooded, so you can clean and dry the wooded subflooring. If the linoleum or tile had been previously installed on a concrete base, only loose linoleum or tile needs to be removed.

Wall-to-wall carpeting, padding, and foam rubber that came in contact with floodwater must be thrown away.

Thoroughly clean all hard surfaces (concrete, hard surface flooring, countertops, appliances, sinks and plumbing fixtures) with hot water and laundry or dish detergent. Disinfect using a solution of one cup bleach to five gallons of water.

## **Duct Work**

If vents and ductwork for air conditioning and heating were submerged in floodwater, they need to be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized. Ducts made of compressed fiberglass cannot be cleaned and must be replaced. Discard and replace insulation around ducts.

## **Food and Beverages**

All packaged canned or fresh food that came in contact with flood or storm water must be discarded to avoid flood-borne illness. Throw away perishable food (including meat, poultry, fish, eggs and leftovers) that was without refrigeration for two hours or more. Frozen food which thawed but did not reach a temperature above 40° F may be cooked or refrozen.

## **Wells and Septic Systems**

If you have your own well and it was flooded, it must be chlorinated and tested prior to use. Contact Mecklenburg County at 980-314-1680 for instructions on chlorination. It is important to know the diameter of your well casing and depth of the well.

If your septic system was flooded, please call Mecklenburg County at 980-314-1680 for an evaluation of your septic system before using it. A flooded system may malfunction.

## **Remember:**

When in doubt, throw it out.

Seek medical attention if you become injured or sick while cleaning up after a flood.