

Cleaning Up After A Flood

After a flood, basement cleanup is always a dreaded task. But getting started as soon as possible is not only efficient, it's also important from a health standpoint. After you're confident the flooding is resolved, it's time to start thinking about the cleanup process.

But before you go downstairs and access the damage, take care that the situation is safe. There are many potential safety hazards with flooded basements, such as raw sewage, structural damage, gas leaks, and electrical shock. Flood waters can have all of these, even if the water appears clean. Chemical hazards from upstream flooded areas may have migrated into your yard and then into your basement. ***Cleanup needs to start soon but never at the expense of your personal safety.***

Whenever possible, document the damage. Take both photos and video if possible. It will aid in insurance claims.

How to Clean-up a Flooded Basement

First, you need to decide if you want to take on the task of your basement cleanup. It's a big job and although the equipment needed can be rented for a reasonable price, it might be worth your time and money to simply hire a service to perform the work for you.

Furthermore, if you live in a community that has experienced flooding, the companies that perform these services may be overwhelmed and it may take days or even weeks for them to be able to work on your basement. In this case, if possible, you should start the job yourself.

Necessary Tools

- Wet/Dry Vacuum / Sump Pump
 - Pen/Chalk
 - Shovel
 - Mop

- Industrial blower
- Garden Hose
- Protective Clothing, including eyes(glasses) and mouth(mask)
- Disinfectant
- Dehumidifier

Water Removal

Small Floods

If you have an inch of water or less covering a small amount of space on your floor, you can most likely use a [wet/dry vacuum](#) to remove the water. These vacuums are meant for small jobs and most have tanks that hold between 3 to 5 gallons of water.



Wet/Dry Vacuum

A wet/dry vacuum can handle small floods.

[Learn More](#)

Moderate and Large Floods

A submersible or [sump pump](#) is best suited for larger basement cleanup jobs. Use caution when operating a sump pump. Wrap the electrical cord around a beam or railing to prevent it from being submersed in water.

Connect a garden hose to the pump and run the other end away from your house. If possible have it drain into a storm drain.

If your [basement flooded](#) due to an outside water source such as snow fall or heavy rain, wait until the water outside of your house has receded and do not pump the water out too fast.



Sump Pump

A sump pump is better suited for larger flooding.

[Learn More](#)

Removing the Water

Pump one third of the water outside, or a maximum of 2 to 3 feet. Then mark the new water level on the wall. If the water level rose overnight, your basement is still flooding, and you should wait to remove the rest. When heavy rain or snow fall was the cause of your flood, the water pressure in the soil surrounding your foundation is likely high. The saturated ground outside is exerting pressure against the foundation. If the water is removed too rapidly, the basement foundation walls may crack or even crumble.

Continue to mark the wall so that you will be able to monitor the incoming water levels. However, do NOT finish pumping the water from your basement until the flooding has finished.

When the water level stabilizes, you can resume pumping the water outside until you have removed another third of the water. Again, mark the level on the wall and wait until the next day. Continue this process until all the water has been removed. Use a wet/dry vacuum to pick up any small pools of water.

Always watch your foundation walls for cracks or structural failure. If you notice anything, stop pumping the water immediately. This is a sign that the foundation is shifting and an indication that the water outside has not drained enough to relieve the pressure that is being applied to the outside of your foundation's walls.

Basement Clean-up

- Insulation materials.
- Inexpensive articles that have been soaked. Including mattresses, box springs and particleboard furniture.

After removing the water, it's important to begin your basement cleanup job as soon as possible in order to prevent [mold and mildew](#).

Safety

Always put safety first since a flooded basement can bring many [health risks](#) into your home. Wear protective clothing, such as gloves, rubber boots, and overalls. If sewage water was involved, wear a face mask and protective eyeglasses to protect yourself from harmful gases.

Use caution around electrical equipment and/or sockets. It is best to avoid all appliances and electrical equipment until everything is completely dry.

Dirt Removal

Flood water nearly always brings mud into your basement. Before the mud dries shovel it outside.

Mud and dirt may also be on your walls and furnishings. Use a hose and rinse everything several times until all of the debris has been flushed away.

Do not allow the mud to dry and harden, it is much easier to remove while it is still moist. Once you have flushed it off of your walls and belongings, use a wet/dry vacuum to clean up the water.

Removing Damaged Items

Unfortunately, there will be some of your possessions that you will not be able to salvage, especially if you had sewage in your basement.

The following items should be discarded:

Items Not Salvageable

- [Flooring](#), including carpet, that has been deeply penetrated by floodwater or sewage.
- Walls and ceilings that have been soaked and have absorbed water. Walls should be removed 20" above the water line.
- Insulation materials.
- Inexpensive articles that have been soaked. Including mattresses, box springs and particleboard furniture.
- Items such as furniture coverings, pillows, cushions, and stuffed toys cannot be properly sanitized.
- Canned goods, vegetables, herbs, and any other food that came in contact with the flood water.

Salvageable Items

Many items can be saved if they are cleaned properly.

- Floors and carpets that were only minimally affected by the flood. They should be rinsed and cleaned as quickly as possible. Carpets should be cleaned and deodorized. Consider having them professionally cleaned.
- Furniture that has had minimal contact with flood water. Scrub the furniture with an antibacterial soap or steam clean.
- Clothing. Machine wash in hot, soapy water with *one cup of chlorine bleach*.
- All items that show no visible signs of contamination. They need to be cleaned and dried thoroughly.

Disinfect & Sanitize

Never mix chlorine bleach with ammonia. The fumes are toxic.

Thoroughly disinfect and sanitize your entire basement and any items that you are trying to salvage. Use care when [working with bleach](#) and other cleaning supplies. Basements frequently have poor ventilation, and the fumes can be harmful. All surfaces should be washed down with *chlorine bleach at a ratio of 1 cup bleach to 1 gallon water*. Be sure to rinse all surfaces after cleaning. Kill all mold with bleach and leave cupboards, closets and wall cavities open until they are thoroughly dry.

Drying

All walls, flooring and other items within the basement must be completely dried to prevent [basement mold](#) growth.

Expose your basement to as much air flow as possible by, weather permitting, opening all windows and doors. Use fans or industrial blowers as well as your furnace heat and fan to help evaporate the water.

Use a [dehumidifier](#) to remove any moisture the fans were unable to dry from your basement. Windows should be closed when using a dehumidifier, and the holding container will need to be checked and emptied regularly. Move the unit around the basement to maximize its results.

Consider hiring a professional to clean and dry your carpets. If you choose to do the work yourself, they should be dried within 2 days.

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