

Flood-Damaged Furniture and Appliances

DECIDING WHAT TO SALVAGE AND TIPS ON RECONDITIONING

Evaluating appliance damage is a high priority after a flood. Have a service person check flooded appliances before you attempt operation or invest a lot of time in clean-up.

Deciding which furniture to save may be a more personal issue, especially if you have antiques and other pieces with sentimental value. Keep in mind that you don't need to repair all pieces of salvageable furniture immediately. You can clean, dry and store them in a warm, well-ventilated place until you have time to deal with them.

APPLIANCES

Before entering a home after a flood, be sure that the electricity to the dwelling has been completely shut off. (See the fact sheet, "Electrical Systems and Appliances.") Appliances should not be operated until they have been checked by service personnel.

Here are some things that may need to be done:

- ◆ Electrical motors may need to be reconditioned or replaced.
- ◆ Wiring and fixtures need to be checked and cleaned. They may also need replacement.
- ◆ Before cleaning and sanitizing an appliance, be sure the motor is in safe working order. It may not be worth the time to clean up the unit.
- ◆ A rust inhibitor may need to be applied to all metal parts. Even though an appliance may not have been submerged, rust can develop from dampness in the air.

REFRIGERATORS AND FREEZERS

Sanitize the refrigerator or freezer if water has seeped in. Be sure the motor and freezing unit are in safe working order and insulation is not wet. Wet insulation means replacement may be necessary.

- ◆ Remove and wash all shelves, crispers and ice trays. Wash thoroughly with water and detergent. Rinse with a disinfectant solution.
- ◆ Wash the interior of the refrigerator, including the door and door gasket, with hot water and baking soda. Rinse with a disinfectant solution.
- ◆ Leave the door open for about 15 minutes to allow free air circulation.
- ◆ If odor remains, place several pieces of activated charcoal in an open metal container, or use a commercial refrigerator deodorizer.
- ◆ Wash the outside with a mild detergent and hot water.

LAUNDRY EQUIPMENT

After washers and dryers have been reconditioned, sanitize them as follows:

- ◆ Pour a disinfectant (chlorine, pine oil or phenolic) into the empty washing machine. Then complete a 15-minute cycle at the “hot” water setting.
- ◆ Unplug the dryer and wipe the drum and door with a cloth dipped in disinfectant solution. Rinse with a cloth dipped in clear water.
- ◆ Leave the dryer door open until all parts are thoroughly dry — preferably overnight.

FURNITURE

Before starting to salvage damaged furniture, decide which pieces are worth restoring. Such decisions should be based on: the extent of damage, cost of the article, sentimental value and cost of restoration. Antiques are probably worth the time, effort and expense of restoration. Unless damage is severe, you may be able to clean and refinish antiques at home.

- ◆ Don't try to force open swollen wooden doors and drawers. Instead, take off the back of the piece of furniture to let the air circulate. You probably will be able to open the drawers after they dry.
- ◆ Solid wood furniture can usually be restored, unless damage is severe. It probably will need to be cleaned, dried and reglued. Wood alcohol or turpentine applied with a cottonball may remove white mildew spots on wood. Cream wood restorers with lanolin will help restore good wooden furniture parts.
- ◆ Wood veneered furniture is usually not worth the cost and effort of repair, unless it is very valuable. If veneer is loose in just a few places, you may be able to glue it adequately.
- ◆ Upholstered furniture soaks up contaminants from floodwaters and should be cleaned only by a professional. Get a cost estimate to see if furniture is worth saving. Usually, flood-soaked upholstered pieces should be thrown away unless they are antiques or quite valuable.

Additional resources:

Your county family living agent, your local emergency government office, the American Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency

Related publications:

“Repairing Your Flooded Home,”
American Red Cross/Federal
Emergency Management Agency, 1992.