# Cleaning a Flooded Basement

You will want to start the cleanup as soon as possible after a flood occurs in your home. Before entering the flooded area, you will need to ensure that it is safe to do so. There are many hazards that come with flooded basement cleanup, including electric shock, gas leaks, raw sewage and structural damage.

### Safety First

A flood can introduce a number of health risks to your home. First, turn off the electricity and gas to the flooded area.  Protect yourself by wearing protective clothing, protective eye wear, face masks, including overalls, gloves and rubber boots. Avoid any electrical equipment or sockets until you are confident everything is completely dry. Even though the electricity has been turned off there is still a small chance of shock.

### Step 1: Pump the Water Out

- Floods that are less than an inch deep and cover a small amount of space can likely be dealt with by using a wet/dry vacuum. You will have to empty the tank regularly.
- For areas flooded with several feet of water, you will need to use a submersible pump, or sump pump. If the flood has come from an outside water source (heavy rain or snow fall) you will need to wait until the flood water has receded away from your house.

    **Do not pump it out too fast:** If there has been a heavy rain or snow fall recently, there's likely a high amount of water pressure in the soil outside of your basement. The pool of water inside your basement may actually be balancing the outside pressure, and removing it too quickly could cause your basement walls to crack or crumble.

- - When pumping water out of your basement, start by removing one third of the water, or no more than two to three feet.
  - Mark the level of the water on the wall and leave it overnight. If the water level has risen the next day, you will have to wait to remove the rest of the water. Mark the new water level and monitor it. Do not finish pumping out the basement until the flooding has stopped.
  - If the water level has remained the same then you can continue pumping it out. Repeat the same process as before, pumping out one third or two to three feet. Mark the level again and leave it overnight. Continue this until all the water has been removed from the basement. A wet/dry vacuum may be required to remove small pools of water that the sump pump can't get.
  - Attach a garden hose to the pump and position the hose away from your house, preferably somewhere where the water can run into a storm drain.

    During the water removal process, watch for any cracks or structural failure in the walls. If seen stop immediately. The shifting of the foundation likely means the water outside the walls has not drained and is putting too much pressure on the walls.

### Step 2: Cleaning and Sanitizing

Once the water has been removed from your basement, you will want to clean up the area as soon as

possible to prevent mold and mildew from growing

### Remove Dirt

Shovel out debris while it is still wet. Any dirt sticking to walls and furnishings can be hosed off. You will want to remove this dirt before it dries and hardens. Use a wet/dry vacuum to remove any water left behind by the cleaning.

### Remove Any Damaged Items

Some of your possessions will be able to be salvaged but other items will need to be thrown out, especially if raw sewage was involved in the flood. The following items should be thrown out:

- All ceilings and walls that have absorbed water. Remove wall materials at least 18 inches above the water line.
- Any flooring or carpet that has been soaked by floodwater or sewage.
- Food and canned goods that came in contact with the flood.
- All insulation materials.
- Articles such as stuffed toys, furniture coverings, pillows, furniture, box springs, mattresses, cushions and paper goods, as they cannot be properly sanitized.

### Salvage Valuable and Savable Items

If cleaned properly many items can be salvaged. This includes:

- Floors and carpet that have been minimally affected by the flood. Rinse and clean any flooring as quickly as possible. Clean and deodorize all carpets. If possible have them professionally cleaned.
- Furniture that has been minimally affected by the flood. Scrub all furniture with antibacterial soap and water and place outside to dry (weather permitting) or steam clean.
- Scrape heavy dirt from washable clothes and machine wash them in hot water and soap, adding one cup of chlorine bleach to the wash water.
- Items of particular value that show no visible contamination. Make sure to clean and dry all items thoroughly.

### Sanitize and Disinfect

- Thoroughly sanitize the entire flooded area and all salvaged items. When using bleach and other cleaning supplies make sure there is ample ventilation to ensure the removal of any harmful fumes.
- Wash all surfaces with chlorine bleach, using a solution of one cup of chlorine bleach per gallon of water. Rinse all surfaces after cleaning.

## Step 3: Drying Your Basement

- To stop mold from growing you will want to make sure the walls, flooring and any items inside the basement are completely dried. Carpets need to be dried within two days

- Open doors and windows to expose the area to as much air as possible. If basement heater was not affected by the flood, turn it to the highest setting to help evaporate the water from the wet area.
- Set up a dehumidifier to get rid of any remaining moisture. Keep the windows closed while using the dehumidifier and remember to empty dehumidifier regularly. Move the dehumidifier around the room to get rid of as much moisture as possible.

For more information, call 211 or search our online database at:

- www.helplinecenter.org/211database and use the following keywords:
  - General Disaster Information
  - Mold Pollution Information
  - General Minor Home Repair Program
  - Home Rehabilitation Programs