

# Protecting your home and valuables after flooding or a leak



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for TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

The wet, rainy summer has been great for corn and other crops, but not so good for the victims of flooding. For the lucky ones who miss the floods, the high humidity has been enough to create a wide range of problems in homes

Unwelcome water problems create heartache, health problems and often financial hardship. Knowing how to protect yourself and recover from the water event can keep a bad situation from getting worse.

Understanding water damage and recovery can be important to almost everybody. Frozen pipes, burst washing machine hoses and many other common occurrences can result in serious water damage. Flooding can occur almost anywhere. As a college student, the author's dorm room on the 18th floor was flooded by the sprinkler system on the 19th floor. Strange and silly things that cause water damage do happen.

Weeks, months and possibly years after leaks and flooding occurs, new problems can arise from improper or incomplete restoration. Plaster can fall, wood can rot, and building exteriors collapse all as a result of uncorrected moisture problems. Allergies, neural and respiratory diseases as well as other serious health threats can result from improperly or untreated water problems.

**All you ever needed to know about water damage you learned in high school gym class.** You may have learned about life in kindergarten, but water restoration education is learned from sweat soaked gym clothes left in a locker. If you doubt this, just remember the waft of stink while walking past a locker containing very ripe gym cloths on a Monday morning. Yuk!

The distinctive nasty locker smell is the product of fungi, mold and bacteria growing on the sweat soaked towel and cloths. The odor problem goes from bad to worse until the stinky gym clothes leave the building.

Wall and furniture cavities and hidden surfaces such as carpet pad can create the same conditions as the dirty gym clothes. Nasty bacteria, mold and fungi can be found on every surface of a home. Flowing water drives the organic pollutants into every recess. Floodwaters can also deposit the bacteria from sewage.

Drying only the exposed surfaces of a building does not kill the hidden mold and bacteria any more effectively than cleaning the outside of the nasty smelling locker.

**All of the excess water must be removed from a**

**building after water problems occur.** Pumping and draining of standing water in a building is the obvious first course of action. However, be careful to not pump out standing water until the outside water has subsided. Many homes and foundations have collapsed when the inside water was removed while the outside water was still pushing against the foundation.

The next course of action is the removal of the water absorbed by exposed materials using vacuum suction. "Extraction" is the industry word for this process.

The final and most often ignored step in the process is "drying" or dehumidification to remove the trapped moisture from a building.

## Moisture will deteriorate most building materials.

Mother Nature uses water to recycle. Water rots wood, turns steel back into iron oxide, and softens the gypsum in plaster. Water and organisms work together so that substances can return to enrich the earth.

Wood that is soaked will immediately start to decay. Mother Nature uses the decay process so that dead trees turn into topsoil for new trees. Rotting wood windows are often the first sign of moisture trapped inside of building walls.

Plaster, drywall and other gypsum products absorb moisture like a sponge. The bonds that hold plaster together slowly dissolve in humidity. Trapped moisture weakens plaster more each day. Plaster surfaces also breed mold, mildew and disease.

Cloth and paper will deteriorate from moisture. The surfaces of drywall, wallpaper and other coverings decay from moisture. Wallpaper paste and latex paint is a great food for mold growth. It could take months or years to notice the growth that is making someone sick.

Moisture will also deteriorate metal fasteners that are used to support facades, stone veneer, decorations and artwork. Steel products swell, expand and weaken with water damage. Water trapped behind these products can cause the failure and collapse of entire exterior walls.

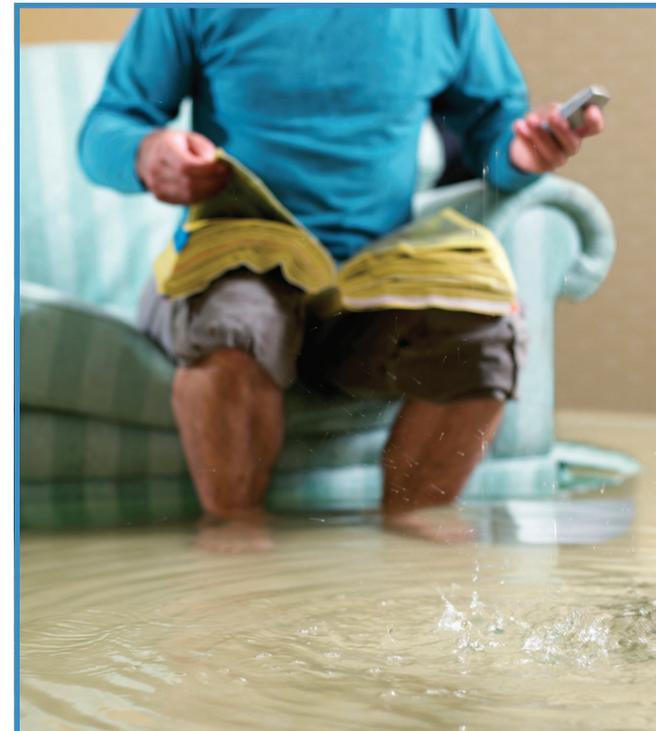
## Restorative drying is simple but critical chemistry.

One way to dry out gym cloths is to hang them on a clothes line. Rolled up tight gym cloths will not dry out even in the open air. We know to unroll the wad of gym cloths if we ever want them to stop smelling.

The same chemistry applies to buildings. The way to achieve this is to install vents or cut openings that allow air to ventilate on as many sides of damp materials as possible. The trick is to know the locations where the ventilation is needed.

Killing the organic growth is important. Washing, exposure to ultra-violet light, soap and many approved commercial chemicals can disinfect gym cloths. The same processes can be used to clean contents and building materials.

**Manage the humidity to reduce the time and cost of drying a property.** The gym locker is easier to disinfect and less smelly in a dry hallway than in a humid area close



## ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR AFTER A FLOOD

- Do not enter unsafe structures
- Cut off electrical power until checked by an electrician
- Do not enter the home if the water has not subsided
- Do not enter the home until the gas is shut off
- Leave the gas line and gas appliances off until checked
- Do not use water damaged appliances until checked
- Wear gloves, mask, eye protection and good shoes
- Pictures and books can be preserved by freeze drying
- Take photographs of the damage for insurance use

to the hot showers. Simply heating the air in a building is not the magic answer to drying out the property. Heat without dehumidification can increase the extent of property damage just as a hot shower room can make gym cloths smell worse.

Imagine a schoolbook inside the locker with the wet gym cloths. The damp environment will also damage the book. Warm moisture inside of a property can warp woodwork and have other nasty and unexpected effects. The drying rate must be managed based upon the materials found in the property including the contents.

No matter what the cause of water damage, quick action can protect your investment and treasures.

Go to [www.EnviroSpect.com/Flood](http://www.EnviroSpect.com/Flood) for more information and links to important flood and disaster recovery references

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