

## What to do After A Flood

### Prioritize your health and safety

- Assess and mitigate hazards before beginning - unstable buildings, down trees, electric lines, etc.
- After the water recedes, turn off any flooded or unstable utilities that were left on during the flood. Switch off electrical circuits that were flooded. If you don't know which circuits were under water, switch off your main breaker. Also shut off gas and oil if you know how. Do not stand in water if the electricity is still on - wait for the water to recede before going near the house.
- Wear protective equipment. Flood waters carry all kinds of hazards - avoid contact with them or the dust after the mud has dried out. What equipment you need will vary depending on your situation but work clothes, rubber boots, gloves, safety glasses and an N95 respirator if there is dust or biohazards like mold or sewage are minimum. Consider your current health before spending time in a flooded building. This kind of work can make allergies, breathing problems and other health issues flare up.
- Work carefully - mud is slippery, flood debris can catch or trip you, and things will not be where you expect them to be. Go slow and careful, especially at first.
- *Let people know your situation and ask for help.* Cleanup can be difficult but there are many people who were not flooded looking for ways to chip in. Hardwick Area Neighbor to Neighbor coordinates volunteers and supplies - contact them at (802) 441-3301 or [hardwickneighbors@gmail.com](mailto:hardwickneighbors@gmail.com)

### When the water recedes

The next steps are to reduce mildew and rot which are bad for you and your home. These thrive in damp environments so the goal is to dry things out as fast as possible. Since the effectiveness and safety of homeowners using products to treat rot and mildew after it has taken hold is not well established, prevention by drying is the priority. You usually have 3-7 days to get things open and surfaces dry.

1. If you have insurance, talk to them about what kind of documentation they need. Take images or videos of everything for reimbursement even if you do not have flood insurance. Sometimes other sources become available after a disaster.
  2. Open windows and doors for ventilation. At this point this is mostly for your own health.
  3. Start pumping out the basement but don't worry about getting the water out immediately. Taking 3-4 days is often recommended. If there is still standing water around you or the water table is still very high, the water pressure pushing in can damage your foundation by erosion or breaking off chunks.
  4. Remove all personal belongings from flooded areas so you can work on the house. Getting rid of possessions may be hard but you need to be realistic about what items are and are not salvageable based on your situation.
- Food touched by flood water is not safe.
  - Paper and particle board items are generally not salvageable (photos and important documents can be frozen and saved by a professional).
  - Absorbent items like cloth take a lot of labor to salvage. Stuffed furniture usually can not be dried out quick enough.
  - Hard items made of plastic, solid wood or pottery, etc. can usually be saved with a thorough washing.
  - Electric motors often work fine if they are rinsed with clean water to get the mud out and dried.
  - Put dry things in a dry location, out of the way - on an upper floor or higher outbuilding.
  - Make two piles outside for the wet items - one for things that can be washed and kept and one for things that cannot be salvaged.

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5. Shovel, hose and sweep the mud out through the doors. Then mop and sponge. Work from the top down and clean all parts that were under water, including walls and cabinets. You can hose out the house even if water is still in the basement. Do the same to the basement when you can. Muddy water can be pumped out with your sump pump or a more heavy duty mud pump. Cleaning mud out with a garden hose and push broom is much easier, quicker, and safer than working with dusty, caked mud later on.
6. Open up all hollow spaces in your home that were flooded or had water wick up into them. Tear out one side of all walls 1-3 feet above the flood level. Tear out both sides if it is sheetrock. If you tear out sheetrock 4" up, it will be ready for replacement. Pull out carpet and other floor coverings like linoleum that prevent drying. Open cabinet doors and drawers before they swell shut. The space under cabinets and islands can be difficult and you may need to drill holes or pull them away from the wall and put them up on spacers to get airflow. Remove receptacle and light switch covers (after switching breakers off). Open up crawl spaces.
7. Pull out all wet, fibrous insulation and throw it away.
8. Once access is established, hasten drying.
  - Airflow is the most effective way to get moisture out of walls and floors. Open up as many doors and windows as you can on all floors and the cellar. If the wind is not blowing, use fans to blow the air out (not in). Also use them to move stagnant air out of corners or cupboards and anywhere that is drying slowly. Turn on bathroom and kitchen fans. Open up the bottom of your chimney.
  - Some people use heat lamps to help dry difficult spots.
  - Air conditioners and dehumidifiers may help in certain situations but the home owner models are not designed to take out high volumes of water. Also, they are only effective if all the doors and windows are shut, nullifying your most effective method. They can be helpful if you have a small space that you can't get air to flow through or later in the drying process when the volume of moisture is less. Also if it is so humid outside that nothing is drying. Do not let dehumidifiers empty onto the floor - this defeats the purpose.
  - Water in the cellar or crawl space adds to humidity in the upper floors - get them as dry as you can at this stage.
9. All systems should be checked and cleaned by a professional before switching them on, including heating, cooling, electrical and fuel tanks. Wells and springs that were flooded need to be tested before using.

### Rebuilding

- Contact your zoning administrator to see if you need permits to repair or rebuild. They may also have information for how to get help and guidelines for how to rebuild to minimize flood damage in the future.
- The State of Vermont asks that people call 211 to report damage, even if it is minimal. This may help with funding recovery efforts.
- Flooded appliances usually need to be replaced. Put the new ones higher than anticipated future floods if possible. Flooding is expected to increase in Vermont, so putting them even higher than the current flood level may be wise.
- Test the wood in your home with a moisture meter to make sure it is below 15% before rebuilding. This may take weeks or months. If the house is structurally sound, you may be able to live in it while you are cleaning and as it dries. The Jeudevine Library has a moisture meter to loan out.

This sheet was made by volunteers from Hardwick Area Neighbor to Neighbor. Last edited 8/9/24

For more information from the Zoning and Floodplain Administrator in Hardwick, please call (802) 472-1686 or email at [zoning.administrator@hardwickvt.gov](mailto:zoning.administrator@hardwickvt.gov).