

# Cleaning Up the Mess After the Flood or Sewage Back-Up

## What is the greatest danger in a flood or sewage back-up?

The greatest danger is not the risk of disease, but the risk of electrocution or explosion. **Do not** enter a flooded basement or light matches until the utility companies have shut off the gas and electric service.

If flood waters or sewage fill your basement, you *must* clean properly to prevent you and your family from becoming sick or injured. **Do not bring children into the flooded area during clean-up!** If you experience a sewer backup, it is recommended that a professionally trained restoration firm be utilized. If it is a small event and you prefer to do the work yourself, the following are suggestions on how to clean up a flood or sewage problem.

## Cleaning and Sanitizing

1. Drain all flood waters and/or sewage by natural draining or pumping.
2. Remove dirt, soil and debris from surfaces that came in contact with flood waters.
3. Wash down all walls, floors and surfaces that the flood water or sewage touched with clean, warm or hot water and a low suds detergent.
4. Rinse again with warm or hot water.
5. Sanitize by rinsing walls, floors and surfaces using one of the following mixtures:
  - o 2½ tablespoons (tbs) of Lysol/Pine Sol per gallon of water used, or
  - o 8 tablespoons (tbs) of laundry bleach (i.e., Clorox, Roman Cleanser) in each gallon of water used.
6. Air the area by opening windows or using fans.
7. Prevent tracking flood debris and sewage into clean areas.

## Utilities

The following guidelines should be followed when entering a flooded area with gas and/or electricity present:

1. Have the utility companies shut off the gas and electricity.
2. **Do not** touch the fuse box or any plugged in cords or appliances until the electricity is shut off.

3. If an electrical appliance motor or its controls are submerged under water, **do not** start it until consulting with the dealer or service company.
4. **Do not** relight appliances until checked by the gas company. Make sure all pilot lights are on before relighting burners.
5. **Do not** light matches until the gas is turned off. If there is a gas leak, it could cause an explosion.

## Clothing and Bedding

Clothing, carpets, furniture, toys and/or bedding should be discarded unless they are cleaned and disinfected. Movable objects could be put outdoors to be cleaned and dried in the sunlight. Discarded clothing should be placed in a tightly closed container until pick-up or disposal.

After clean up, make sure that all clothing and parts of the body that came in contact with the flood waters and sewage are thoroughly washed. Be sure to wash hands immediately afterwards.

Persons engaged in cleaning operations should be particularly mindful of their personal hygiene. Contaminated fingers should be kept away from eyes, nose and mouth. Persons are advised against smoking at this time because soiled fingers carry disease germs to the cigarette and then to the mouth. After cleanup, hands should be thoroughly cleaned using a nail brush and a lot of soap.

## Foods

Foods that are contaminated can make you and your family sick. They should be dealt with in the following manner:

1. Destroy and discard *all* contaminated bottled and boxed foods.
2. Canned goods (including home canned jars) may be kept if cleaned thoroughly. To clean containers:
  - Scrub with soap and water. (Use a brush around the rim of home canned jars.)
  - Submerge in chlorinated water for 15 minutes (1 ounce of bleach per gallon of water).
  - Air dry to prevent rusting.
3. Food stored in a freezer will keep for 2 days after losing power, if the freezer is full (1 day for a half-full freezer) and not opened.
4. If your freezer cannot be started in a day or two, store food in someone else's freezer.
5. Meat that has ice crystals may safely be re-frozen. If it is only "cool-feeling" it is best to cook it, and then re-freeze it.
6. Food stored in a refrigerator will keep for 4-6 hours after losing power, depending on how warm the room temperature is. **Do not** open the refrigerator unless absolutely necessary. You may add ice to the refrigerator if you know it will be turned on soon.
7. Throw out anything with an unusual color, order, or if a perishable food is above 45° F internally.

8. Place discarded food in a tightly closed container until pick up or disposal.

**Note:** This information base was compiled from various state and local health agencies. Although this outline may be sufficient for your community's needs, contact your local health agency for further suggestions.