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Cleaning Up and Renovating After Your Basement Floods

Each year, several million home basements experience some water penetration. And, even if the flooding in your basement isn't catastrophic, if left unattended, it can create a health hazard and cause immediate and long-term damage to your basement and its contents.

Cleanup and restoration professionals offered these suggestions for dealing with minor basement flooding:

First, **find where the water is coming from and stop the leak**. Unless the leak is clean water from a burst pipe, flood waters should be considered contaminated. Even rainwater picks up pesticides, lawn chemicals, and other pollutants and care should be taken to limit exposure to it. If you have concerns about proper clean-up, consult a professional or check out one or more of the web sites that deal with post-flood clean-up.

Act quickly to remove the water to minimize moisture damage and prevent the growth of mold. The longer water stands, the more it penetrates wall and flooring materials. And, with the right combination of temperature and high levels of humidity, mold will begin to grow on exposed surfaces within 24 - 48 hours, said Kevin Trumbull of Trumbull Building & Remodeling in New Hartford, Conn.

Check floor coverings, walls and furniture to determine the extent of water penetration. If dampness has wicked up your finished walls, it's time to call in the professionals, said Ed Perryman, president of Perryman Consulting & Construction Services, Barrie, Ontario. In such cases, the potential for hidden mold growth is very

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high and it is essential that wet sheetrock be removed, the affected area dried out and new sheetrock installed.

Remove everything, including furniture, exercise equipment and electronics gear from the wet areas and dry each item. In addition to preventing water damage, removing these items eliminates pockets of moisture that could be trapped underneath, and allows you to pull up your finished floor. If, for some reason, you can't remove something, put it up on blocks to keep it away from the dampness and allow air to flow underneath. Porous items such as upholstered furniture, carpets and padding that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried should be discarded.

Lift up the finished floor – carpet, laminate, vinyl or wood – and remove any padding or underlayment materials, and the subfloor, if you have one.

Dry out the area and clean it thoroughly. Remove standing water with a special wet vacuum, not a regular household vacuum cleaner, cautioned Marc Bresson, owner of Servicemaster of Milwaukee. Bresson also suggested damp mopping with mild detergent and hot water to kill bacteria and remove mold.

Continue the drying process by renting large fans and blowers designed specifically to create adequate air circulation to evaporate the remaining moisture. Run the dehumidifier. You'll need to reduce the relative humidity to 50 percent or less, at a temperature of 72°F. It's also a good idea to invest in a humidity sensor that will read humidity levels. Use it to monitor the drying process.

Rebuilding After a Flood

If the flooding gives you the excuse you need to embark on a total basement makeover, the contractors recommend hiring a professional who specializes in flood restoration and can recommend solutions that will manage basement moisture, prevent mold growth and foster a healthy living environment. But in any case, they identified several "must-do's" that are frequently overlooked in planning a basement project, but are essential to protecting your investment.

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- Before framing and installing new interior walls, begin by installing good quality insulation against the masonry walls, one that will not trap moisture in the space between the masonry wall and the finished wall.
- Plan for adequate ventilation and air exchange to prevent stale, moisture-laden air from accumulating in corners and "dead spaces." Perryman recommended locating heat registers and cold-air returns low on the walls to encourage air movement and evaporation at floor level, where moisture is most likely to accumulate.
- Finally, both Trumbull and Perryman suggested installing a subfloor, such as DRIcore (www.dricore.com), instead of laying the new finished floor directly over the concrete. This all-in-one modular subfloor has a built-in moisture barrier that will prevent future small leaks from ruining your basement and its furnishings. The subfloor's raised design allows air to circulate between it and the concrete to help evaporate moisture. It also keeps the finished floor from coming into contact with cold concrete for a warmer, drier floor.

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