

Cleaning up after sewage backup

Be prepared

Being prepared before an emergency strikes will benefit you greatly in:

- Reducing your stress and protecting your health.
- Minimizing possible exposure to health hazards.
- Minimizing loss to personal property.
- Aiding in recovery.

Municipal sewer backup

Immediately contact your municipal office upon detecting sewage backup if connected to municipal sewers. Include your municipal 24/7 emergency contact phone numbers in your emergency preparedness plan.

Do not use your toilets or pour water down sink drains until your municipality notifies you that the municipal sewage system has been restored.

Insurance coverage

Know what your insurance coverage is and know where your household insurance policy is located. Do not wait until you experience a flood or sewer backup to inquire about your household insurance coverage and insurance company policies.

Immediately call your insurance provider to report household flooding and request direction on how they want you to proceed.

Your health

Being safe after sewage backup in your home, also means considering your health, as there are health risks associated with contacting untreated sewage water.

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Basic information and cautions

Sewer flood waters are heavily polluted with viruses, bacteria and parasites, and when building materials and furniture become wet with flood waters, extensive mould growth can be expected to follow.

Failure to remove mould contaminated materials and reduce moisture and humidity can present serious long-term health risks such as respiratory disease and allergic reactions. Individuals with mould allergies or compromised immune systems are most at risk of potential illness. Mould may also damage building materials long after the flood.

Natural gas or propane appliances

Be prepared, call your service provider and be educated on what to do in the event of a flood. This could be done at the same time as your annual appliance service/inspection. Know your service provider emergency/after hours contact phone numbers.

Call your service provider immediately upon discovering a flooded basement. Your service provider 24/7 emergency contact number should be located in a safe area, not in the basement where flooding may occur.

Floodwater or sewer backups can damage gas appliances by clogging burners and short-circuiting control systems and monitors. You'll need to have a licensed technician inspect, dry and repair flood-damaged appliances before these appliances are put back into service.

Electrical hazards

In the event that flooding has occurred and electrical power is energized, do not wade through water to attempt to shut off the main switch. If there is flooding in the basement and the power is energized, contact your service provider or local fire department for assistance.

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Have all electrical installations and appliances inspected/serviced after being exposed to floodwater or sewage. Floodwater or sewer backups can damage electrical installations and appliances, creating a potential safety hazard. For instance, if you plug in wet appliances they can burn out or cause serious shocks.

When proceeding with the cleanup procedures listed below, please proceed with caution.

Below are basic, suggested guidelines for cleaning up after a sewage backup. For more comprehensive cleanup assistance you may consider calling professional cleaners. Most cleaning companies offer free estimates. Refer to the Yellow Pages for professional assistance, your insurance company may also provide a list of accepted professional cleaners.

If you do undertake any cleanup yourself, proceed with caution.

Protect yourself. Wear coveralls, rubber boots, gloves and a protective face mask (i.e. a respirator) that will prevent inhalation of fine water droplets and dust. Always **wash your hands** with soap and properly treated water before preparing or eating food, after toilet use, after participating in flood cleanup activities, and after handling articles contaminated with flood water or sewage.

Step #1: Gather the necessary cleaning supplies.

- brooms, mops, brushes, sponges
- buckets, hose
- gloves
- rags

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- cleaning products
- disinfectants
- trash bags

Step #2: Sort damaged contents to be repaired or discarded.

Items soaked or contaminated by sewage fall into two categories. Might throw away and always throw away.

Might throw away

You may wash bedding, sheets, and pillowcases several times in cold water with a small amount of bleach.

Always throw away

- Food (The only safe sewage-exposed foods are those sealed in metal cans and only if the cans have not been dented. Thoroughly clean and disinfect all undamaged cans before opening.)
- cosmetics
- books and paper products
- medicines and medical supplies
- stuffed animals
- toys
- carpets
- rugs
- mattresses and pillows
- upholstered couches and chairs
- carpet padding
- cardboard

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Step #3: Clean up one room at a time.

The two-bucket approach is most efficient.

- Use one bucket for the cleaning solution and the other for the rinse water.
- After using the cleaning solution, rinse your mop, sponge or cleaning cloth in the rinse bucket.
- Wring it dry. Re-wet your mop in the cleaning solution.
- Using two buckets keeps most of the dirty rinse water out of your cleaning solution.
- Replace the rinse water frequently.

After cleaning a room or item, go over it again with a disinfectant to kill germs and smell left by the sewage. You may also need to get rid of mildew.

In cases of heavy contamination, you should spray all surfaces with disinfectant. See disinfectant formula below.

Suitable cleaners:

- dishwashing liquid for lightly soiled items
- laundry detergent for heavily soiled items

Suitable disinfectant:

- household chlorine liquid bleach (5.25%)
 1. 250 ml (1 cup) of bleach to 4.5 litres (1 gallon) of water for disinfecting cement
 2. 15 ml (1 tablespoon) of bleach to 1 litre (1 quart) of water for disinfecting wood and other materials

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Do not mix bleach with other household chemical products, especially ammonia or toilet bowl cleaner. The chemical reaction can create a poisonous gas.

Step #4: Dry out your home and remove mildew by lowering the humidity.

- Open up your house - open outside doors and windows.
- Open up closet doors and cabinet doors.
- Circulate the air with fans.
- Run a dehumidifier.

Development Documents:

1. Public Safety Canada, Floods - What to do? (72 hours, is your family prepared?) www.getprepared.ca
2. The City of Calgary, Cleanup after Sewer Backup Information Guide – Last Modified August 18, 2008
http://www.calgary.ca/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_104_0_0_35/http%3B/content.calgary.ca/CCA/City+Common/Emergency+Communications/Cleaning+Up+after+a+Sewer+Back+Up.htm
3. City of Ottawa, Homeowner's Guide to Sewer Surcharging and Clean-up - http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/waterwaste/backups/resource/guide_en.html