

Tips to property owners with flood-ravaged property

Residents whose homes or businesses were damaged by flood waters should consider these cleanup guidelines:

- * You will notice that the Borough's Building Code Officer has likely visited your home, possibly before you have returned. Based on the flood elevation and suspected inundation upon mechanical and electrical systems or structural concerns, the code officer will post your structure as uninhabitable. If this occurs, all utility services will be turn-off and in severe cases, meters removed from the structure. Borough officials and/or its representatives will coordinate and notify property owner's of the requirements to be met in order for utility service to be restored. The property owner may work in the structure, but cannot live and sleep in the structure.

- * Be careful when entering a flood-damaged building. Do not rush to move back into your home. Before a house is habitable, it must be dried and thoroughly cleaned, since floodwaters pick up sewage and chemicals as they travel. Loose, wet ceiling plaster is heavy and dangerous, so knock down hanging plaster before moving around. Watch for holes in the floor and loose boards with exposed nails.

- * Once inside, turn off the gas, water and electricity shut-offs inside the structure. Wear rubber-soled shoes or boots and rubber gloves and turn off the main switch using a piece of rubber, plastic or dry wood while standing on a dry board to avoid electrocution.

- * Do not pump the basement until the water inside and outside the structure has gone down, as pumping a water-filled basement could result in the walls collapsing.

- * Never use a gas-powered pump or generator in an enclosed area; carbon monoxide fumes could overcome you.

- * Test plumbing and basement drains by pouring a bucket of water in them. If the water does not run out, remove the clean-out plug from the trap and rake out the mud with a wire.

- * Open doors and windows to ventilate and dry the inside, and wait until all floors, ceilings, walls and furnishings are dry and free of mold and mildew before trying to repair or salvage them.

- * Everything that floodwater has touched should be disinfected. Scrub down walls and any other smooth, hard surfaces with a solution made of clean water and two-percent chlorine bleach. Two to three capfuls of chlorine bleach to a bucket of water are recommended. Wear gloves when disinfecting surfaces.

- * Do not attempt to repair floors until they are fully dry. Dry wood floors as soon as possible by opening all doors and windows, which should prevent them from shrinking and deforming. Once dry, buckled floors may be drawn back into place with nails, and planing and sanding may remove humps.

- * Remove drawers and clean all mud and dirt from wooden furniture. Be sure to dry furniture slowly and indoors to prevent the sun from warping it.

- * If possible, simply air-dry family treasures such as books, photographs or paintings. If wet books, documents, photographs or textiles cannot be air-dried within 48 hours, freeze them if you have a freezer that is large enough. If not, keep them as cool as possible until air-drying is possible.

- * Washers, dryers, electrical service panels and furnaces can usually be cleaned and tested by qualified electricians. Replacing expensive appliances after a flood is usually not necessary if the proper steps are taken immediately after the water has receded. Coordinate all electrical service panels and furnace

repair work with the Borough's Building Code Officer to insure all codes are followed and an occupancy can be granted.

* Mattresses, carpets and rugs should be discarded. In most cases, mattresses and rugs become so saturated with contaminated material that cleaning attempts are futile. Coordinate your refuse stockpile location with Borough officials.

* If floodwaters has reached your drywall walls; the drywall should be removed from six inches above the floodline down to the floor and replaced. Once the drywall is removed, insulation should also be removed and replaced to insure the backside of the exterior wall can dry and no mold or mildew forms in these area. Flooded wiring and outlets should be inspected by a qualified electrician to determine if replacement is necessary. Coordinate all repair work with the Borough's Building Code Officer to insure all codes are followed and an occupancy can be granted.

* To deal with leaking home fuel tanks in flooded basements, remove the fuel oil from the surface of the water and place it in a container for disposal. The water that is under the product can be directed to the nearest waterway or drain. After pumping your basement, try to remove and place in a container any remaining product and stop the leak in the tank.

For more information, visit the flood-related information page at www.dep.state.pa.us.