



## Post-Flood Cleaning and Disinfecting of Structural Components

The floodwaters have receded. The contents of your home are piled up on the curb. The trim, doors, drywall, appliances, and cabinets are in their own pile on the curb, and you're wondering "How do I/we clean this up and start rebuilding?" Here are some recommendations we have on "cleaning up the mess."

- 1) **Document Everything!** Take photos of everything. They may be able to assist you with insurance claims and FEMA paperwork.
- 2) **Sweep and Vacuum:** If it hasn't been done yet, sweep up all the remaining bits of drywall, trim, and nails/screws. Remove any remaining drywall nails/screws and trim nails from the framing, to avoid getting snagged on them or cut by them. Use a "shop-vac" style vacuum with a HEPA filter to vacuum every square inch of framing and flooring.
- 3) **Time to Clean!** Take a bucket of clean water and add some plain, blue, Dawn™ dish soap to it. Take a clean microfiber towel, soak it in the soap/water solution, and wring it out. Fold the towel in half until you have a square about 4" remaining. Wipe each stud in one direction on all sides. When the exposed side of the towel becomes dirty, go to the next side, unfolding the towel back onto itself until it is all used up. Then get another clean towel and keep going, until all the framing and flooring is cleaned. **Never put a dirty towel back into the clean soap and water solution!!** If your home is on a concrete slab, you can use a pressure washer to clean the floor. Your home is already wet, but try and minimize soaking the exposed framing.
- 4) **Time to Vacuum Again!** With your shop vac and HEPA filter, vacuum every square inch of framing and flooring again. This will pick up any debris knocked loose by the thorough cleaning you have done. The HEPA filter traps very small particles of drywall dust, and more importantly, the HEPA filter even traps mold spores and bacteria/viruses in it. For even more protection, if your vacuum has the ability to use bags as well as the HEPA filter, use them!
- 5) **Time to Disinfect!** Now that you've documented, swept and vacuumed, cleaned, and vacuumed again, it's time to take the battle against mold, bacteria, and viruses to the next level. There are several disinfectants on the market, in concentrate and ready-to-use forms. Many times, the local authorities, FEMA, Red-Cross, or other organizations make them available to you at no cost. Whichever you choose to use, **always fully read and understand the directions for mixing and use, and most importantly, follow the manufacturers recommended personal protective equipment (PPE)!**



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Make sure to use safety glasses/goggles, gloves, N95 mask or even better, a true P100 respirator. Some of the disinfectants we recommend are:

- a. **Benefect™**: This is a botanical-based, ready-to-use, moldicide/biocide. It is not always on the shelf, but is usually available for order from your local home center.
- b. **Concrobium™**: This moldicide/biocide comes ready-to use and in concentrate forms, and can often be found at your local home center.
- c. **Shockwave™**: This moldicide/biocide typically comes only in a concentrate, so be sure to read the mixing instructions fully. More is not better – follow the label!!

The best method to apply the disinfectant is to use a plastic, pump up, garden sprayer, with the tip set to a fan pattern. Apply the disinfectant to all of the exposed framing and the flooring until it is visibly wet.

- 6) **Time to Dry it out!** The “muck-out” or demo is done, you’ve thoroughly swept, vacuumed, cleaned and disinfected your home, and the question is now “When can we start rebuilding?” As much as you want to get going, the dryout process has to be complete, otherwise you can put your health and your home’s health at further risk.

The construction and restoration industry has some pretty specific guidelines on when something is at its particular “dry standard.” They are:

- a. **Drywall/plaster**: 0.5% or less moisture content
- b. **Wood framing**: 8%-12% moisture content
- c. **Plywood/OSB**: 8%-12% moisture content

Most home centers and hardware stores carry relatively affordable moisture meters that are very easy to use, or if you are working with a professional restoration contractor, they will have equipment to check the moisture content of the various materials. The use of dehumidifiers and fans, either box fan or carpet-style fans, will greatly speed up the drying process. Running your air conditioner, if it is operable, will also help. Your HVAC system is a huge dehumidifier, so use it if you can.

In conclusion, rebuilding too quickly after a flood can cause ongoing problems, so all affected surfaces must be cleaned and disinfected. Without the use of drying equipment, it may take weeks for the wood in your house to be adequately dry, and if a wall is covered with drywall to quickly, in the end you are placing family’s health at risk, and risk compromising the structural integrity of you home. **Seek professionals to assist you in making sure your house is safe to rebuild.** Be careful in the rebuilding process to ensure you are working with licensed, qualified, and reputable contractors. Ask for references and check them, don’t give into fear or pressure on decisions, and above all, do not be afraid to tell a contractor **“NO!”**