

Flood Damage Cleanup Tips

If you need help cleaning up, call Crisis Clean Up: 844-965-1386 or 800-451-1954 to be placed on a list for assistance by more than 140 relief agencies who are coordinating cleanup efforts. We can't guarantee you'll be helped, but we can guarantee you won't be forgotten.

STEP 1: Preparations & Safety

DOCUMENT:

Before you begin, for insurance purposes, document with photos and / or video what is in the house. In normal circumstances you would wait for an insurance adjuster to visit and catalog your items, but if you can't wait, at least document the items and their location. Same with your carpet, cabinets, etc. Make sure you have proof that it was in or on your property before you move it. Also keep receipts for any cleanup supplies you buy like trash bags, masks, tools etc for later reimbursement. The basics of documentation are to photograph the material in your home, photograph it being removed, and photograph it where it is left for removal. You have a right to remove anything that is considered a public health hazard (environments that encourage the collection of rodents certainly falls under this category). Remove a swatch of carpet and keep this for reference. Small pieces are all that are needed (Examples include: flood rotten trim piece, carpet pad piece (small is fine), carpet sample. What has to be verified is that the items removed actually were a part of your residence, or were inside your residence (furniture, etc...).

MOLD: If you are removing mold, it is important for you to know the health hazards. The EPA has a good guide that provides a lot of information, but most noted is to use N95, P95 or R95 respirator, protective clothing (disposable coveralls are very helpful with this type of removal), shoes and gloves. This waste needs to be separated from other waste. The mask must fit securely over your face and stay seated when you are moving around. If your facial hair is preventing the mask from sealing against the skin, you are not protected!

See: <https://www.epa.gov/mold/mold-cleanup-after-floods>.
<http://ebolapreparedness.org/n95-vs-p95-vs-r95-respirator-masks/>

This is physically demanding and dirty work. **Suggested clothing** is long sleeves, long pants, and closed toed shoes. **Suggested protective equipment** is a half or full face N95, P95 or R95 mask, non vented goggles, and gloves. Even if the airborne particles don't bother you, they can make you sick. Wear that mask, please! It's also a good idea to remember to take breaks, and stay fed and hydrated.



(it may or may not have a valve and it may also be blue in color)

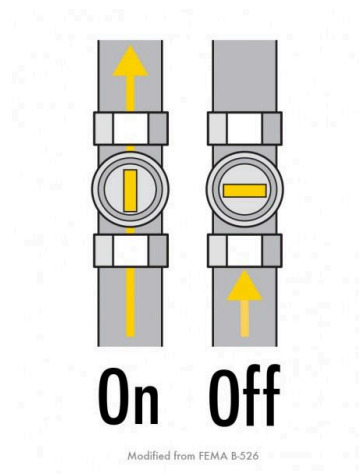
Non-vented goggles and safety gloves look like this, but if you don't have mold, you can use common work gloves:



Before you begin work, locate the utility disconnects (where the source for electricity comes into your home). The home should have a main electrical breaker box (metal box on the exterior of the house), a water main shut off valve (often located at the curbside meter). It usually looks like this:



Shut off the gas to each appliance if you have to move them or disconnect them.



A

All pipe shut offs are set up so you can easily tell if it is off or on - (See A).

Turn off all valves you can find before you proceed.

Turn off your hot water heater in your house (some may also be inside your home). When you have your water turned off for long periods, pressure and water can build up inside it and cause it to burst.

Even if the power is off, it could come back on at any moment so turn off the main breaker anyway. Remember, the main breaker is the one on the house where the big electrical box is located that services your home.

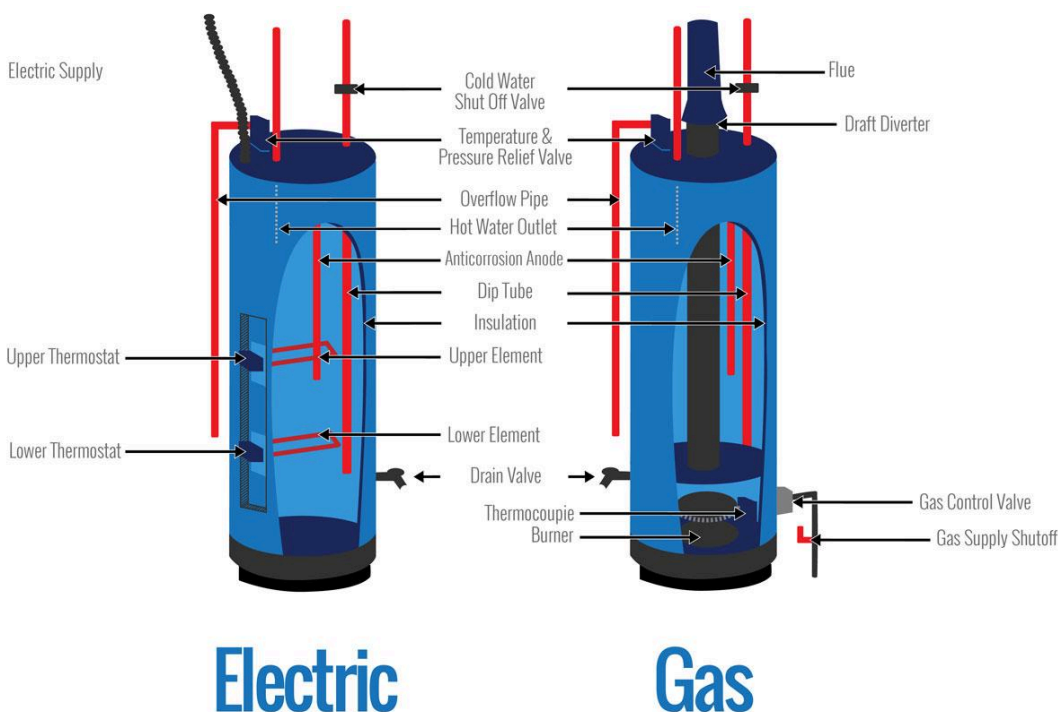
Don't skip this step, your safety is worth the trouble!

In case you don't know what type of hot water heater you have, there are several types of hot water heaters. This diagram is generally what each type looks like:



To find the shut off, you may need to look a bit since there are several types of hot water heaters, but in general, you will have either a gas or an electric. When we talk about gas, we are talking specifically about natural gas.

If your electricity is shut off (which it should be if there is any water in your home), then your electricity to the hot water heater is also shut off. But, you still want to make sure you cut off all main power sources that heat the water in your hot water heater so that the water inside cools down.



This diagram above shows you the typical hot water heater most people have if they don't have a tankless. You can see that the electric and gas look a lot alike. And, if you don't know the difference, this is helpful. For most, the main thing is that you will see the electric usually has both an upper and a lower thermostat. The other way you can tell is that a gas hot water heater has to have a flue that sits on the top to allow the excess draft air to escape. This leads through your attic and out the roof of your home. And, on the gas tank, you will see a red lever that is your gas supply shutoff. Notice on the diagram on the right that it is shown as a red L shape. That's the shutoff you want to make sure you do. Again, perpendicular is off, parallel to the pipe is on (See page 2 diagram A).

Step 2: Items removal (assuming all water is out of the house at this point)

Start by photographing everything in the interior of your house. The more photos the better. Do this first so that you are sure you have what you need later to document your damage. Try to think like an insurance adjuster when you do this. You want to be able to document the kinds of materials you have in your home. If you have used expensive materials, it is best to keep at least a sample of each of these so that you can get full credit when the damage is assessed. But the main thing to remember is to photograph in detail. Every material surface, every item that you will be expecting to receive some value for when your insurance claim (or FEMA claim) is completed.

WORK FRONT TO BACK:

Start with furniture and belongings located on the floor or lower 3 feet of your home.

Remove all furniture and items that need to be removed from the house.

Start at the front door and work your way further into the house to minimize people bumping into each other as they haul things out and to keep from adding water weight to any carpets as you move through the house. Think of it this way - we want you to have the easiest and fastest time removing things from the house and working front to back will do this.

If the fridge needs to be removed, **secure the door with duct tape** or something else that is secure. If the contents have spoiled it will keep the smell contained, and it prevents young children from playing inside them. **DO NOT** leave a refrigerator outside without securing the door. Deaths have occurred from children playing inside and getting locked in.

If gas appliances need to be removed, shut off the service valve at the appliance, even if you've already turned off the main gas (this is also discussed in the information about your gas hot water heater). This keeps the lines clean and prevents leaks if the main valve is opened again. To shut it off, the easiest way to remember is that the lever lines up in the direction of the gas that would be running through it (again, see page 2, diagram B). So, parallel to the pipe is on and perpendicular to the pipe is off.

As you haul items out, leave items in separate piles if possible: Appliances, Hazardous materials, Electronics, Trees and vegetation, Construction debris and Furniture, and Regular household garbage. If you have spare tarps or plastic sheeting, setting your construction debris on top of it can prevent nails, screws, and drywall chips from getting left behind in your lawn.

Keep everything you pile up away from fire hydrants, poles, and trees to make it easier for pickup. These items will be going to separate areas for disposal and recycling, and pickup may be delayed if they are all grouped together. This goes a long way at getting things removed from your front yard area when collection takes place and it allows this to have quicker.

Step 3: Flooring removal

Remove wet or damaged flooring next. Again, try to start at the front door and work your way towards the back and upper floors. You will definitely need to get carpet and padding out. Other floors may dry out, but wood floors will often buckle and warp and will need to be removed as well. If you have engineered wood flooring, there will also be a subfloor padding that the wood floor planks were sitting on. This also needs to be removed. Remember - you are photographing along the way. Document your work as you are going through it. That way the insurance adjuster knows the items came from your home and are being removed from your home.

Step 4: Remove drywall and insulation

Begin by removing all baseboards along every wall with water damage. (Baseboards are the wood trim that sits against the bottom of your wall). See image below:

There is usually a small piece of wood that is on

Even if only the floors were wet, removing the baseboards allows the walls to vent out moisture, and if the drywall will be removed, the baseboards should come off first.

Again, document this in detail.

Drywall comes in 4'x8' sheets, although sometimes a 2 feet wide sheet is cut to fill spaces. Try to remove drywall in the largest sections possible. This makes removal easier. Remove drywall to 1 foot above the high water line at a minimum, but if you have more than a foot of water damage, then you want to remove up to the driest point. Often, drywall will be installed horizontally (with the long side lying sideways). If that is the case and you have quite a bit of water damage, lift the bottom and pull upwards gently. Sometimes the sheet will split at the seam (4 foot height). Documenting this is important because the appraiser is going to decide whether you need 1' replaced, 2' or 4' and this is all totalled to come up with the price for your drywall replacement (part of their formula).

On exterior walls that are insulated, remove all damp insulation behind it. Insulation needs to be removed with gloved hands. Depending on the type, it may be filled with fibers that will itch like crazy if you don't cover your hands (you were supposed to be wearing gloves anyway, remember?).

Removing cabinets with sinks or electrical installed can be tricky. If you aren't sure you can do it safely, open up the cabinets and try to remove the bottom panels if possible to help them dry out.

Step 5: Cleaning and Drying out and mold / mildew treatment

Use shovels, wet/ dry vac, brooms, mops, whatever you have to clean the floors as best you can. Clean and treat remaining surfaces like wood studs, flooring etc with a bleach solution that is 1 part bleach to 10 parts water. Use your respirator (face mask) to protect yourself. The fumes from bleach are strong and you need protection and you need the space to be open so it ventilates the fumes well.

<https://www.familyhandyman.com/cleaning/mold-and-mildew/how-to-remove-mold/view-all/>

Leave all bedroom and closet doors and cabinets open. If it is safe and the power can be turned back on, point fans into damp areas. If the AC is operational, turn it on and set the thermostat as low as possible, the AC will pull moisture out of the air and dump it outside, speeding up the drying process.

If you have access to a dehumidifier, this can be helpful in the areas with the most moisture. Most people don't have access to one for every room, so just be selective in placing it in either the room that seems it will take the longest to dry out, or in an area that can pull moisture from a larger area. Humidifiers are made to work on certain size rooms depending on the capacity of the unit. Yours should say how many square feet it will cover.