

emergency REDiPlan

Cleaning furniture and appliances after a flood

Furniture

Remove the back of the piece of furniture to let the air circulate. Don't try to force open swollen wooden doors and drawers; you will probably be able to open the drawers after they dry.

Solid wood furniture can usually be repaired and cleaned, but wood veneer often separates and warps. Apply wood alcohol or turpentine with a cotton ball to remove white mildew spots on wood. Cream wood restorers with lanolin will help restore good wooden furniture parts.

Upholstered furniture soaks up contaminants from floodwaters and should only be cleaned by a professional. Unless the piece is an antique or especially valuable, upholstered furniture should probably be thrown out. Get a cost estimate from a professional to see if furniture is worth saving.

Appliances

Warning: Do not plug in and turn on any appliance. As the risk of electrocution from a flooded electrical appliance exists, a licensed electrician should check power supply and electrical appliances before they are plugged in.

Washing machines, dryers, dishwashers and vacuum cleaners will be needed to help clean your home and contents. Only clean and disinfect dishwashers, washing machines and dryers with water that has been declared safe for drinking. Make sure the sewer line is working before starting a dishwasher or washing machine. Seek the advice of a licensed electrician to determine if the appliance can be salvaged.

Refrigerators and freezers are more complicated. They may have foam insulation and sealed components that have suffered water damage. However they hold food, so they should be cleaned, disinfected, and checked by a professional, or replaced. If you receive advice that an expensive appliance should be replaced, get the opinion in writing and discuss it with your insurance assessor before you spend money for another one.

Kitchen Items

Throw out soft plastic and porous items – e.g. wood items – that have probably absorbed floodwaters. Floodwaters are contaminated, so you may want to wash dishes by hand in a disinfectant. Air-dry the disinfected dishes; do not use a tea towel.

The dishwasher should be used only after you know your water is safe to drink and your sewer line works. Clean and disinfect it first. Then use a hot setting to wash your pots, pans, dishes, and utensils. If you have an energy saving setting, do not use it until you have thoroughly cleaned all of your dishes.

Recovery is a long and sometimes tiring process – make sure you look after yourself. See our booklet *Coping with a major personal crisis* or visit www.redcross.org.au for further information.

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Australian Red Cross acknowledges the contribution of American Red Cross in the production of this information sheet.

The Red Cross Emergency REDiPlan project provides people with general information to help them deal with the effects of an emergency.

This information sheet is designed to assist people deal with the effects of floods but necessarily contains only information of a general nature that may not be appropriate in all situations.

Before taking any action you should independently consider whether that action is appropriate in the light of your own circumstances.

Depending upon the particular circumstances of your situation, or if you do not feel confident about undertaking any suggested task, you should seek the advice of professional services.

In any event, before undertaking any suggested task you should always contact your insurer.

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