

## Cleaning Flooded Upholstered Furniture, Curtains, Bedding, Table Linens, and Other Household Textiles

Before attempting to clean flooded household textiles, here is some important information that you need to know.

- Make sure you have a disinfectant that has an EPA Registration Number on the label. This assures that the product has met EPA requirements for disinfectants.
- Make sure you have the right disinfectant for the job. Check the directions. Other than chlorine bleach, most disinfectants are effective only on hard surfaces.
- Be sure that wash water is safe to use before washing household linens.
- Clean and sanitize your washing machine if necessary.
- Use a hose to remove wet mud and dirt. Scrape dried mud and/or shake dirt and residue from fabrics. Then, rinse or wash as soon as possible to help prevent the growth of mildew.

mud and silt may have penetrated the fabric and padding. The padding will hold the water, causing mildew to grow inside and out. Finished wood surfaces will become cloudy. If water penetrates the finish, the wood will mildew. Joints in the frame may loosen. The furniture also may be contaminated with sewage, pesticides, or industrial chemicals that were in the floodwaters. It may be best to discard the upholstered furniture.

If you decide to restore upholstered furniture, you must strip it down to the frame. Springs may or may not be salvageable depending on the type and how they are attached to the frame. "S" springs attached with metal clamps can be cleaned and disinfected. Coil springs attached to a webbing hose of burlap or rubber may be more difficult to assess. Burlap webbing can mildew and will probably need to be replaced. A reupholsterer can tell you if it will cost less to purchase new coil springs or clean and reattach all the existing springs to a new base.

The reupholsterer can also estimate the cost of replacing springs, padding, fabric, and labor. Use this estimate to

### Upholstered Furniture

When faced with flood-damaged upholstered furniture, your options are limited. If the water reached the upholstery, the fabric may be stained or watermarked. If the chair or sofa was in water for several hours or more,

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decide whether to buy new or reupholster damaged furniture. Consider the quality of the frame itself and any sentimental or monetary value (restoring an antique may be worthwhile).

If you decide to salvage an upholstered piece, you can repair the wooden frame.

1. Disinfect the wood frame using one of the following three techniques.
  - Wash it with a chlorine bleach solution ( $\frac{3}{4}$  cup bleach to 1 gallon of water)
  - Spray it with a phenol product (such as Lysol) Follow directions on the label.
  - Brush it with an undiluted pine oil disinfectant.
2. After disinfecting, put the frame in a well-ventilated location so that it can dry out slowly. Don't put it out in the sun. It will dry out too quickly, and the wood will warp and twist.
3. Periodically remove mildew from the frame. Mildew may grow on the frame until the moisture content of the wood drops below 20 percent or less. Clean off the mildew periodically, using one of the disinfectants mentioned above.
4. After the frame dries out, re-glue any loose joints. If you don't, the sofa or chair will squeak every time someone sits on it.

## **Draperies, Curtains, and Other Window Treatments**

Draperies and curtains, especially full-length draperies, may have one or more problems due to the floodwaters. Color change, bleeding of dyes, shrinkage and permanent watermarks from migrating finishes are common. If window treatments were in the water or in the damp environment for a few days, mildew will grow. Mildew is a difficult problem since the disinfectants used to kill it, may affect fabric color and finish.

Shades, aluminum, vinyl or wood blinds, and vinyl or wood shutters may not be salvageable. Metals and metal parts corrode, wood may swell and warp, and you may not be able to clean and sanitize the cloth tapes and cords without further damage.

## **Mattresses**

Throw out any innerspring mattress or box spring that was partially or totally submerged in floodwater contaminated with sewage, pesticides, and industrial chemicals, etc. You may need to throw out mattresses even if the floodwater was not contaminated because it is almost impossible to dry mattresses thoroughly before mold begins to grow. Buying a good used or new mattress is the best choice for your health in the long run.

You can salvage a mattress or box spring that has gotten wet from a leaking roof or had minimum contact (only 1 to 2 inches of contact for only a few hours) with *clean* floodwater (i.e. broken water lines). Clean the surface and put the mattress right-side-up in the sun to dry as much as possible. Use blocks to keep it off the ground and allow air to circulate around it. Use a fan to circulate air and speed up the drying process. But, if there is a musty odor after it dries, then mildew is present. You should have the mattress or box springs sanitized by a professional. Look in the yellow pages of the telephone book under "Mattress-Renovating" for a professional in your area.

If sanitizing does not remove the odor, then throw the mattress out. Remember, sanitizing the mattress may kill molds that are present at the time, but unless the materials are completely dry inside, the mold will grow back again. That will be unhealthy for anyone using the mattress.

## **Pillows**

Throw out pillows that came in contact with contaminated floodwater. It will be difficult to remove all the dirt and silt from the fabric weave and the inside material and almost impossible to disinfect them thoroughly.

Rain-soaked pillows can be salvaged. Here are some instructions for washing.

### ***Feather Pillows***

- If ticking is in good condition, wash feathers and ticking together. If you are unsure about the condition of the seams, then put another pillowcase over the pillow and baste the opening closed with a sewing machine.
- Machine wash the pillows in warm (not hot) water for 15 to 20 minutes using a laundry detergent and disinfectant. Do not wash more than two pillows at a time.
- Use the extra rinse cycle to remove all traces of detergent and disinfectant.
- Place in a clothes dryer set on a moderate heat setting. Add several bath towels or a clean tennis shoe in the dryer with the pillows to speed up drying and to keep the pillows moving. It may take several drying cycles to dry them completely. Fluff the pillows with your fist occasionally to shake up the feathers and hasten drying.
- To air-dry, hang by two corners on the clothesline. Change position end to end and shake feathers often to speed up drying.

Throw out feather pillows that were badly soiled with debris or insulation or if they are not in good condition. The glass fibers from the insulation will be very difficult if not impossible to remove.

### ***Polyester Fiberfill Pillows***

- Brush off surface dirt.
- Machine wash in warm water using an enzyme detergent. Tumble dry at a moderate setting with several bath towels, or press out as much water as possible by hand and hang pillows on the clothesline to dry.

### ***Foam Rubber or Urethane Pillows***

- Remove cover
- Follow manufacturer's directions if they are available. Otherwise, soak in cool water; then machine wash.
- Dry away from heat or sunlight. Do not dry in dryer unless on an "air only" setting. Pillows may dry very slowly in the air. If the pillows are old, they may crumble.

### **Bed, Bath, and Table Linens**

Mildew will start to grow on sheets, tablecloths, towels, and similar items that are in water for 24 to 48 hours. Even linens in a closet above floodwaters can mildew if left in the flooded house for 4 days or more. If the stains from contaminated floodwaters have dried, machine wash the washable linens using an enzyme detergent and warm water. Then, wash them a second time in hot water using a chlorine bleach to sanitize them. Remember that color-safe (oxygen) bleaches do not disinfect. (Note: If there is a large amount of iron in soil

deposits on the linens or if your water has a high iron content, chlorine bleach can cause rust stains to appear on fabrics.)

If flooded fabric appears to have rust stains, try a commercially prepared rust remover. Look for these products in the laundry or fabric dye section of the supermarket. Usually they are intended to be used on white or colorfast fabrics as they can cause color removal. Follow package directions and test first on a small area that won't show. Remove the rust stains before you disinfect with chlorine bleach.

Do not dry fabrics in a dryer until satisfied with the results. Drying in a dryer can set stains, making them impossible to remove.

### **Blankets, Quilts, and Comforters.**

Blankets, quilts, and comforters may need special care. Check the care label to see if chlorine bleach can be used. Use bleach and use the hottest water temperature that is safe. Wash only one blanket, quilt, or comforter at a time. If the stains from contaminated floodwaters have dried, machine wash the washable linens using an enzyme detergent and warm water. Then, wash them a second time in hot water using a chlorine bleach to sanitize them. Some large comforters must be washed in an extra-large

commercial washer. Following final washing procedure, rinse heavy items at least three times in clear, warm water. Spin off water or gently squeeze out as much water as possible. When satisfied with the results, dry in an automatic dryer at moderate heat setting, or dry in a warm room with a fan, or across two or three clotheslines. Putting several dry bath towels in dryer with blanket, quilt, or comforter will speed up drying.

### **Washable Woolen Blankets**

Shake and brush well to remove loose dirt. Wash in lukewarm (barely warm) water with mild soap or detergent. Use a disinfectant. Remember that chlorine bleach cannot be used on wool. Dry in

warm place or in direct sunlight.

### **Electric Blankets**

Electric blankets submerged in flood waters may have wiring damage and should be discarded. If the blanket is just dirty, follow manufacturer's directions for cleaning. Most manufacturers recommend electric blankets be washed, not dry-cleaned. Avoid bending wiring. Do not put electric blankets through a wringer or dry in a dryer, unless manufacturer says it is safe to do so. To dry, squeeze down blanket lengthwise and hang over two lines. Check label to find out if a disinfectant like chlorine bleach can be used. If the blanket was soiled by contaminated floodwaters and cannot

be thoroughly disinfected, throw it out.

### **References:**

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