

How to Salvage Flood-Damaged Appliances

Cleaning Appliances

Water, especially dirty flood water, causes many problems if it gets into an appliance. If it gets into an electric motor, the windings, electrical contacts and switches may corrode or short out. If it gets into insulation, the usefulness of the insulation in keeping heat in (ranges) or out (refrigerator/freezers) may be less than it should be, and odors may exist for years. You should also consider the fact that new federal energy savings laws have forced the manufacturers to produce a much more efficient product. A new appliance may pay for itself in savings on your electric bill, especially if the manufacturer chooses to help you out on the initial cost.

First...

Before entering a home after a flood, be sure that the electricity to the dwelling has been completely shut off. If you are not certain how this is done, get a licensed electrician or authorized service man to do this for you. If there is still water surrounding the appliance, don't go near it until you are certain that the electricity to that appliance is off. Many flood-damaged appliances can be salvaged, but they must be thoroughly dried out first and should be checked out by an authorized service technician before being plugged into an electrical outlet. Cleaning and sanitizing should probably await the electrical check; it may not be worth the time to clean up the unit. Move the appliance to a location where air can get to it and prop the doors open. You may want to set a fan inside or nearby to increase the air flow. Make certain that a small child can't get inside and close the door. The drying process may take a week or longer.

Don't Hose Them Down

Because your appliance may be mud- and water-filled, it may be tempting to hose it down. Don't do it! Water may get into places that the flood didn't reach, and you will only increase the damage. Instead, wash the appliance with a wet cloth and common household cleaners like Formula 409 or Fantastik. Rinse with a disinfectant solution (one teaspoon of chlorine bleach for each gallon of water) to sanitize and discourage mildew. Dry with a towel.

K-State Flood Survival and Recovery Fact Sheet MF-1131, Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service.

Trade names are used to provide specific information; no endorsement is intended, nor is criticism of similar products implied.

Rachel Lipsey, Program Associate, Biological and Agricultural Engineering

3/2006

Getting Rid of Odors

If an odor persists, wash with a solution made by adding one teaspoon of baking soda to a quart of water or one cup of vinegar or household ammonia per gallon of water. Activated charcoal (carbon), usually available where swimming pool or aquarium maintenance supplies are sold, will gradually soak up persistent odors. Place a thin layer in a large cookie pan and leave it there for 6 to 8 hours. It will then need to be reactivated by placing the pan in an oven, set at 350°, and leaving it there for approximately 1 hour. This procedure may be repeated indefinitely, as the charcoal never wears out. Refrigerators and freezers with wet insulation probably can't be salvaged. While older models with fiberglass cabinet insulation and metal liners can be saved by replacing the insulation, this is a high-cost repair, and the money might better be spent on a new, higher efficiency model. Cabinets with polyurethane foam insulation and seamless plastic liners resist water better, but, once soaked, are not repairable.

Built-In Appliances

Built-in ranges, ovens and dishwashers (not portable or free-standing) generally have a batt of fiberglass insulation wrapped around the inner cabinet, with no outer cabinet. This insulation can easily be removed and replaced if it has become dampened with flood water.

"800" Numbers for Appliance Manufacturers

Even though an appliance warranty does not cover flood damage, most appliance manufacturers have disaster programs and offer discounts on parts of a new product if an appliance is involved in a major flood.

Your county extension agent has a list of "800" numbers for all major appliance manufacturers. Call the manufacturer if you have an appliance which was in flood water and see what they can offer you in the way of advice or financial help before you attempt to plug in the appliance.

How to Save Upholstered Furniture, Carpet and Bedding

Articles that have been heavily contaminated with toxic chemicals such as concentrated pesticides or embedded fiberglass or asbestos should be thrown away. Many products labeled “dryclean only” and severely damaged textiles are already ruined. Due to sewage, pesticides and other unknown toxic materials in floodwaters, many clothing and interior textile (carpet, upholstered furniture, drapery) products should be thrown away.

Some household textiles can be saved. It’s important to use a disinfectant to destroy harmful bacteria that can remain alive on fabrics for a long time.

Upholstered Furniture

Remove padding. Plan to reupholster. Throw away all cotton stuffing and any other stuffing that is badly damaged, contaminated with sewage or other chemicals, or generally impossible to dry, clean or sanitize. Dry thoroughly using a fan and indirect heat. On some days the out-of-doors may be a good place for drying. To protect exposed wood, dry in the sun a short time only.

Carpet and Rugs

Throw away carpet and pad that is heavily contaminated with floodwater and residue. You may be able to save carpet soaked with cleaner groundwater.

Most wall-to-wall carpet that can be saved is best cleaned by a professional rug cleaner or restorer. If you try to restore carpet yourself, rugs and carpet that can be removed and the pad discarded will provide the greatest success (it holds large quantities of floodwater and residue). If possible, dry small rugs out-of-doors in sunlight. Carpets that are glued to the floor without pad can be cleaned in place. Use shop water vacuums as well as dry blankets and towels to blot up excess moisture.

Apply rug shampoo with a carpet shampooer according to manufacturer’s directions. Be sure to remove all detergent used in cleaning. Anytime detergent is left in the product, you will have real problems with accelerated soiling, and you need to be very careful to thoroughly remove any suds or detergent that you have added to the product.

Sanitize by sponging a weak chlorine solution (1/4 teaspoon chlorine bleach to 1 cup of water) or other sanitizing product applied according to label directions and rinsing several times with clear water sponged onto carpet. Do not replace carpet or rug until all subfloors are dry.

After shampooing, dry rugs or carpets quickly. Hang rugs on line if possible, or lay them out flat in a warm, dry place. Electric fans will speed up drying. Carpets and rugs should be thoroughly dried.

Bedding

Mattresses – It probably is best to throw out these products. A good innerspring mattress could be sent to a commercial renovating company; however, many communities will not have such a facility. If you do find such a service, check the cost and expected outcome. Odor may remain, and it may be less expensive to replace the mattress.

Pillows – Many pillows are relatively low cost. Best advice is to throw them away as they are very difficult to sanitize. You may want to try saving feather or down pillows. Contact your county Extension agent for additional information.

Sheets, Pillowcases, Towels and Other Linens – Use the “Directions for Cleaning Soiled Fabrics” on appropriate household cleaners. Refer to care label to determine if chlorine bleach can be used and the hottest water temperature that is safe.

Blankets, Quilts, Comforters – Use the directions on “Cleaning and Disinfecting Textiles” on appropriate household cleaners. Refer to the care label to determine if chlorine bleach can be used and the hottest water temperature that is safe. Wash only one blanket, quilt or comforter at a time. Some comforters will require an extra large commercial washer for best results. Following final washing procedure, heavy items should be rinsed at least three times in clear, warm water. Spin off water or gently squeeze out as much water as possible. When satisfied with results, you may dry in an automatic dryer at moderate heat setting, or dry in a warm room with a fan, or across two or three clotheslines. Put several bath towels in dryer with blanket, quilt or comforter to speed up drying.