

Returning to your home after flooding

If flood water has entered your house please read the following information to assist you with ensuring your house is safe to return to, you keep yourself safe during the clean up and how to deal with items contaminated by flood water.

A building and health inspection will be required if flood water has entered your house. Please contact the Hurunui District Council on 03 3148816 to arrange this.

Also advise your insurance company of your situation and seek information on what is covered by your policies.

THE CLEAN UP

1 Precautions When Returning to Your Home after flooding

- Remember that floodwaters may be polluted, and all items in contact with water should be treated with caution.
- Personal hygiene is very important to prevent the spread of disease. Ensure that all workers thoroughly wash their hands before eating, drinking or smoking and after cleanup activities.
- Wear suitable protective gloves and footwear during cleanup and repairs.
- Ensure any cuts and abrasions are cleaned and disinfected, and suitable precautions are taken in the event of deep cuts i.e. check tetanus immunisation status.

2 Restoring a house after flood damage

Soon after heavy rains have stopped and waters have drained off the ground surface, sewers will generally return to normal function. It is important to clean up, drain and dry out the house as soon as possible.

- Where possible, take photos of the damage before starting the clean up.
- Remove all wet and damp fittings i.e. carpets and floor covering, beds, furniture, bedding, clothing. Put outside to dry when weather is fine.
- Remove standing water. Check for trapped water and mud in cavities including under floors, under shower trays, baths, benches and bottom shelves. Consult an expert such as an insurance assessor or builder for steps to open up affected areas of your home.
- Increase airflow under houses. Use heaters or hot air blowers in under floor spaces, and open all doors and windows if weather permits. Clear vents in the exterior walls of the house to assist drying.
- Certain building materials may be able to be dried out and saved. Contact an insurance assessor for advice.
- Replace wall linings, floor coverings, etc, after things have dried out.
- Leave redecorating after finishing repairs to prevent risk of mould, blistering and peeling.
- Walls, hard-surfaced floors, and many other household surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected. Pay particular attention to areas where small children play.
- Be particularly careful to thoroughly disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with food, such as counter tops, pantry shelves, refrigerators, etc.
- Clean and disinfect duct work in heating and air conditioning systems if these may have been contaminated by flood waters.
- DO NOT light fires in brick fireplaces without seeking advice, and use only small fires until the firebricks have dried out.
- Consult an engineer if there are signs that the house has moved on its foundations e.g. buckled floors, new cracks in walls, out of shape doorframes.

3 Disposal of goods

Always approach your insurance company about damaged goods before disposing of them.

Assume that anything touched by floodwater is contaminated.

- Ensure any items disposed of are recorded.
- Dispose of mattresses, pillows and soft upholstered furnishings that have been contaminated by flood waters, unless they are able to be washed, disinfected and thoroughly dried. Get rid of contaminated clothing, carpets, upholstered furniture, toys and bedding unless they can be cleaned, disinfected and dried. Items able to be cleaned should be boiled or washed and treated with disinfectant before re-use. Dry cleaning can restore other articles.
- Any flood water affected/damaged electrical appliances should be checked by an electrician before re-use.
- Damaged goods need to be disposed of carefully – contact the council for specific advice 03 314-8816

4 Disinfecting Household Items

- Read labels on the available disinfectants for amounts to use and methods of application.
- When using disinfectants and sanitizers, ensure that label instructions are followed carefully, and use in ventilated areas. Be careful about mixing household cleaners and disinfectants – check labels for advice.
- Liquid chlorine bleach is the least expensive and easiest disinfectant to find but chlorine bleach will damage some fibres. Consult the permanent care label on garments to identify potential problems. Follow label instructions.

5 Cleaning Carpets and Floors after a Disaster

In cleaning water-soaked carpets and floors consider contamination by mud, silt, sewage, and mildew – soft furnishings and carpet floor coverings may need to be disposed of. Professional cleaners should work on carpets and floors, where possible, and cleanup started as soon as possible. Check with your insurance assessor if replacement carpet may be available.

Tips

- Pull up carpets and rugs and drape them outdoors.
- If cleaning carpets, hose carpets down, use a stiff-bristled broom to work a low-sudsing, disinfectant carpet cleaning product deep into soiled spots.
- To discourage mildew and odours, rinse with a solution of bleach. **DON'T USE THIS SOLUTION ON WOOL CARPETS.**
- Dry floor thoroughly before replacing carpet to avoid future mildew problems and shrinkage. Use fans, vacuum cleaners and dehumidifiers to speed the drying.
- Sections of sub-floors that separate must be replaced to avoid buckling. When floor coverings are removed, allow sub-floors to dry thoroughly, even though it may take several months.
- In wood floors, remove a board every few feet to reduce buckling caused by swelling. Ask a carpenter for tips on removing tongue-and-groove boards.
- Clean and dry floor thoroughly before attempting repairs.
- In vinyl floors with wood sub-flooring, the floor covering should be removed so the sub-flooring can be replaced (if necessary). With concrete floors, removal isn't necessary except to hasten drying of the slab.

- Loose tiles may be replaced individually if the floor hasn't been soaked. If water has seeped under sheet flooring, remove the entire sheet.

What to Save

Textile items that have been elevated in the house or building out of the reach of floodwaters should be okay. However, check items for mildew growth. Use products and procedures to remove mildew that will not further damage the specific fibre or fabric in the textile item and intended for home use. If a textile item or furniture piece is an antique or very valuable, consult with a professional cleaner or restorer of textiles and furniture.

6 Cleaning and Disinfection of Clothing Items

In the event of a natural disaster flood water may contaminate clothing with sewage waste, which must be disinfected to:

- kill harmful bacteria
- prevent bacteria from being transferred from one article of clothing to another during laundering
- prevent bacteria from remaining on the inner surface of the washing machine and being transferred from one load of clothes to the next load.

Liquid chlorine bleach is the most accessible, cheapest and easiest disinfectant to use in the home. Follow the directions on the product label to determine the amount of disinfectant needed. Where bleach cannot be used, dry cleaning may be considered.

When cleaning flood-damaged clothing or textiles:

- Separate wet articles and decide what can be salvaged and what should be discarded. Sort out items that should be dry-cleaned or professionally cleaned.
- Items should be cleaned as soon as possible to prevent mildew from damaging the garments. If your laundry equipment has been in the floodwater and is not safe to use, use a public laundromat or equipment at the home of a relative or friend.
- Wear gloves when handling items you suspect may have been in sewage-contaminated water.

If there is no way to wash articles:

- Remove as much water as possible and dry at air or room temperature. Rinse in clean cold water before drying if possible. Do not dry clothes near a heat source such as a stove. Once dry, shake and brush to remove as much soil as possible.
- Rinse washable items several times in cold water. If badly soiled, soak overnight in a bucket or container of cold water and detergent. Wring out and air dry if you're unable to machine wash.
- Machine wash items as soon as possible. Use detergent and a disinfectant at levels recommended for heavily soiled clothing. If safe for fibres and dyes of fabric, use chlorine bleach. Use 1 cup liquid chlorine bleach in a top-loading washer or, 1/2 cup of chlorine bleach for front-load washers. If chlorine bleach is not safe to use, substitute another disinfectant, such as one of the pine oils or other types of disinfectant products that state that the product is safe to use for laundering textile items.
- While washing items, use the highest water level possible, don't overcrowd washer and use hottest water temperature suitable for the garments. Wash for longest cycle available.
- Dry in a dryer (if available) at the hottest temperature suitable for the fabric to further reduce the number of surviving bacteria. Items that cannot be

dried in an automatic dryer, sunshine will help reduce surviving bacteria and odour.

- If an item is still stained or soiled after washing, rewash before drying as drying may make some stains more difficult to remove.

Wool garments (and blankets) that have been damaged by flood water need special treatment. For washable items, shake and brush them to remove soil, then rinse repeatedly in lukewarm water. Launder in plenty of suds using a mild soap or detergent recommended for fine fabrics. A wool safe disinfectant should be used. Rinse thoroughly. Dry wool garments in a warm place out of direct sunlight.

7 Cleaning Flood-Soiled Bedding

Floodwater may be contaminated with sewage, leaving harmful bacteria in bedding. It is recommended that bedding items exposed to long-standing flood waters be discarded.

Bedding items subjected to "flash flooding" may be salvageable. Use common sense in determining whether the time, effort, cost and health risks involved in cleaning bedding outweigh the expense of replacement. Be aware that the cleaning and disinfecting process may destroy some items or affect their quality to such an extent that they may be useless.

Specific information on cleaning and sanitising mattresses, pillows, blankets, quilts and linen is available from the Canterbury District Health Department.