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DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH  
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## **FLOOD CLEAN-UP: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT GENERAL CLEAN-UP**

### **Q: How do I know if it is safe to go into my home to start the clean-up?**

**A:** Waters must have receded sufficiently to evaluate the potential safety hazards around and inside the residence. Outside electrical and gas connections should be checked by the appropriate utility company. Interior connections should be checked by a licensed contractor to ensure that there are no electrical hazards, potentially unsafe gas fumes or potential fire hazards. Floodwaters may have impacted the integrity of the structure, weakening foundations, walls or floors. An evaluation by a professional engineer may be required.

### **Q: Should I wear any type of protective clothing while working on the clean-up?**

**A:** It is important to wear protective clothing such as boots, rubber gloves, long sleeved shirts and long pants to reduce contact with contaminated items. N95 respirators would offer protection against breathing in small particles such as dust, or mold. N95 respirators are available at safety supply stores and most home improvement and hardware stores. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for putting on the respirator and getting a tight fit.

The single most important thing that you can do to prevent becoming ill is to wash your hands frequently and thoroughly. Wash your hands after contacting floodwater, handling contaminated items, and prior to eating, drinking, or handling any food items.

### **Q: Should I discard every item that has come into contact with floodwater?**

**A:** No. You need to discard any items that cannot be properly cleaned and disinfected. Typically these include porous items that can absorb floodwater such as carpets, upholstered furniture, mattresses, drywall, unsealed wood surfaces, etc. Rugs and clothing may be salvageable if they can be laundered with bleach or another disinfectant. However, when in doubt, throw it out. Remember, it is important to follow label directions when using any type of disinfectant.

### **Q: How do I clean items that I plan to keep?**

**A:** Hard surfaces, such as hard plastic, glass, and metal, should be cleaned thoroughly with warm soapy water and then disinfected with a bleach solution or other disinfectant. Avoid inhalation of fumes and follow label directions.

### **Q: How do I know if it is safe to salvage food items?**

**A:** Most food items that come into contact with floodwaters will need to be discarded. These foods include fresh meats, poultry and dairy items (milk, eggs, butter, etc); fruits and vegetables; prepared and processed foods; and crimped, corked, pop-top, capped or screw top glass or plastic bottles. There is no practical way to disinfect these types of packages prior to opening, and the food containers are not considered to be "leak-proof". There is no way to be sure that the foods in the packages have not become contaminated.

Canned goods (sealed metal cans) may be safe for use if the cans are carefully cleaned and disinfected prior to opening. Any cans that are damaged due to swelling, leakage, punctures, holes, extensive rusting, or severe denting must be discarded.

Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be salvaged using the following procedure:

1. Remove labels.
2. Brush or wipe away dirt or silt.
3. Thoroughly wash cans with soap and hot water.
4. Immerse cans in a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water for 15 minutes.
5. Air dry cans.
6. Re-label cans with product name and expiration date with a marking pen.
7. Use the canned foods as soon as possible.

**Q: How do I minimize the growth of mold and mildew in my home after the flood?**

**A:** The best way to minimize the growth of mold is to eliminate excessive moisture. While this can be difficult after a flood, it is important to let the house air out. This will help to remove foul odors and aid in the drying process. Dehumidifiers may help to reduce moisture in enclosed areas. Removing saturated items such as carpeting and upholstered furniture will also help to dry out the structure. (Be sure to dispose of all solid waste properly. See the Department's informational flyer on [Flood Clean-Up: Proper Solid Waste Disposal](#).)

**Q: How do I treat areas that are affected by mold?**

**A:** Remove mold and mildew from hard surfaces using a household mildewcide, trisodium phosphate (TSP) or liquid laundry bleach (1/4 cup to 1gallon of water.) Severely damaged building materials may need to be removed, discarded and replaced. In cases of severe mold growth, professional remediation may be required.

**RELATED LINKS**

Flood Clean-Up: Proper Solid Waste Disposal

<https://www.co.mchenry.il.us/county-government/departments-a-i/health-department/environmental-health/laboratory-services/flood-information>

**If you have any additional questions please contact the McHenry County Department of Health,  
Division of Environmental Health, at 815-334-4585.**