HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

IF YOU HAVE A FLOOD OR LEAK

FIRST: STOP THE WATER

If you find yourself dealing with a serious water leak or flood, the first challenge is stopping any more water from entering your home. Try to identify the source of the water and determine whether you need to call a professional to repair the problem. Once you have the water stopped, you can assess whether the damage is limited enough to tackle yourself or if you'll need a professional.

PROTECT YOURSELF

If you decide to do the clean-up yourself, remember to wear rubber gloves, safety glasses, rubber boots, respirator, and other protection to prevent injury or infection. Also, check for any risk of electrical shock or gas leakage before you start.

DRY EVERYTHING OUT

Your two priorities will be preventing mold growth and repairing water damage. To get air moving through the area, open windows, use fans, and run dehumidifiers (don't forget to empty the tank frequently) until everything is completely dry. Meanwhile, use a wet/dry vac to remove as much water as possible from carpets, upholstered furniture, tile and wood floors, etc., and discard any waterlogged possessions (such as papers, photos, toys) that cannot be salvaged.

DISINFECT

If you're lucky, you will have dried out the surfaces before mold or mildew have started to grow. To be safe, however, disinfect any surface that has been touched by standing water. Scrub floors, walls, and other hard surfaces with hot water or a commercial cleaner, and then wipe them down with a solution of bleach. Make sure to clean thoroughly, using a small scrub brush where appropriate, and let everything dry for at least ten hours before returning to the house.

DISINFECTING SOLUTION

1 ounce of bleach in 4 gallons of water.

IF YOU SEE MOLD

If there are any signs of mold, you'll need to be much more stringent in your cleaning. Gather all contaminated fabric (clothes, curtains, rugs and carpet, etc.) and place them in plastic bags to prevent any mold spores from being released into the air. You should also plan to replace porous or absorbent materials (drywall, wallpaper, and insulation) if they become moldy, because it will be impossible to remove the mold completely.

WHEN TO CALL A PROFESSIONAL

Most people can deal with minor water damage, but professional cleaning companies have tools and specialized knowledge that can help ensure that mold and mildew won't develop, especially with more serious leaks. Professionals are also indicated if the damage comes from sewage or other contaminated water.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Check out the excellent EPA guide to mold and moisture, “A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture and Your Home,” at www.epa.gov/mold/brief-guide-mold-moisture-and-your-home.

Home Repair Resource center

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

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