

(Information from the Detroit Free Press)

Your basement is flooded. Now what?

Wayne County was inundated with flooding this weekend and many are still recovering from the aftermath. Here are some answers to questions you might have about a flooded basement:

First things first: Local and statewide agencies have made it clear that residents should stay out of floodwater, both in the streets and inside their houses. It can contain dangerous bacteria, sewage, oils and debris. If you do come in contact with it, make sure to wash up after, according to MDHHS.

Be careful when inspecting the damage in your basement. Wear rubber boots that are only dedicated to flood cleanup when entering the water to avoid spreading bacteria, said Carol Miller, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Wayne State University.

“Unfortunately there are many people with recurrent flooding,” she said. “If you've had flooding, it's likely going to happen again and the best thing to do is to have a special set of rubber boots that you keep near the basement and you only use it when you're exposed to that floodwater.”

Rubber gloves, goggles and other personal protective equipment are also recommended during flood cleanup to protect your eyes, nose, mouth and skin, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Clean up and dry your home quickly after the storm or flood ends, within 24 to 48 hours if possible,” stated the CDC. “Remove and discard drywall and insulation that has been contaminated with sewage or floodwaters (and) fix any leaks in roofs, walls, or plumbing as soon as you can.”

Avoid electrical hazards and carbon monoxide poisoning

MDHHS says residents should avoid using electricity while standing in the water and should use battery-powered lights if necessary. This also means you shouldn't be using other electric appliances like washing machines, furnaces or air conditioning.

“It's best to turn the power off to anything that is connected to electricity in the basement,” Miller said.

If electrical circuits and electrical equipment get wet or are in or near water, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel, according to the CDC.

Power outages during flooding results in an increase in exposure to carbon monoxide, an odorless, colorless and deadly gas. The CDC and Michigan Poison Center are warning people to never turn on generators, pressure washers or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, wood or charcoal devices inside your home or near an open window or door, as they produce hazardous levels of carbon monoxide.

“People exposed to carbon monoxide may feel as if they have a cold or the flu,” stated the warning issued by the Michigan Poison Center at the Wayne State University School of Medicine. Some symptoms include headaches, nausea, dizziness, tiredness and confusion.

How to drain your basement

If your drains in your basement are not working, which is quite likely if you're experiencing a flood, you are going to have to physically remove the water using pails and taking it to a higher elevation that is far from your home. Or use a pump.

“You put a sump pump or several sump pumps into the basement, underneath the water level, and have hoses running from those that discharge far away from the home,” Miller said. “You don't want to dump the water anywhere where it's going to be getting back into the home.”

The water should be pumped out gradually to avoid structural damage, according to the Red Cross. One-third of the water should be pumped each day.

“If the water is pumped out completely in a short period of time, pressure from water-saturated soil on the outside could cause basement walls to collapse,” stated a Red Cross news release.

What should you throw out?

“The issue is really whether the material itself is porous, “ Miller said. “In other words, whether water is able to migrate inside the product or not.”

Items such as clothes can be cleaned but larger, more porous objects such as mattresses, rugs, carpeting, stuffed animals or upholstered furniture should be thrown out, as porous objects are more difficult to clean and are prone to molding.

The CDC recommends tossing out anything that cannot be cleaned or completely dried within 24 to 48 hours. Cosmetics, wall coverings, books and various other paper or foam rubber products should also be thrown out.

“When in doubt, throw it out,” according to the Red Cross. “This includes canned goods, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and containers with food or liquid that has been sealed shut.”

Large appliances like washers and dryers could be salvaged, depending on the water level in the flooded area. After the water recedes, surfaces and appliances can be sanitized and cleaned with soap and water.