

# Cleaning-up After a Disaster

## Purpose

This fact sheet summarizes handwashing, cleaning of household structure and contents, and food safety measures after a disaster.

## Handwashing

Simple, basic hygiene – handwashing – is the single most important thing you can do to protect your health when you clean up after a disaster.



### The Right Way to Wash Hands

1. Wet hands with clean water
2. Put soap on hands and wrists.
3. Keep fingers pointing down.
4. Rub soapy hands together for 20 seconds.
5. Wash all sides of hands, fingers, wrists, and thumbs.
6. Use a nailbrush to clean under fingernails and rinse well.
7. Dry with a clean paper towel.
8. Turn off faucet with a paper towel.
9. Open bathroom door with a paper towel to avoid touching the door handle.

## Be sure to wash your hands:

- After you touch any surfaces or objects that may have been in contact with debris or other contaminated material; and
- Before you eat or drink, use the bathroom, or touch your hands to your face.
- *Wash Your Hands Thoroughly and Do It Often!*

## What if there is no running water?

- Transport and store clean water in clean plastic containers.
- Get a beverage cooler equipped with a spigot – and keep it filled with clean water for handwashing.

## What if the water is contaminated?

If the water might not be safe, add **one tablespoon** of bleach to **one gallon** of water before you use it to wash your hands.

## How do I get my home clean?

Thoroughly remove moisture to avoid the growth of mold.

## If you have moisture in your home

- Use outside air to dry your home.
- Open windows and doors or use exhaust fans.
- Use a room dehumidifier, if available, and empty it often.

## Water in or on walls and other surfaces

- Release any water or mud trapped in wall, ceiling or floor cavities.
- Open, clean, decontaminate and thoroughly dry cavities in walls, ceilings, and floors.
- Walls must dry from the inside out.
- Remove moisture and debris from all surfaces and get surface materials dry within 24-48 hours after flooding, or as soon as you are allowed into the building.
- Remove all interior wall finishing materials (e.g., wallpaper, wallboard, paneling) and insulation.
- **Throw out any wet insulation.** Discard other materials that cannot be cleaned and dried.
- Do not paint, or replace ceiling, wall tile or flooring until all enclosed spaces are completely dry, to avoid the growth of mold.

## Remember:

- If you think you may have asbestos materials in your home, call MDH at 651-201-4620 (or 1-800-798-9050).
- If you have allergies, wear a dust mask. Consult your physician if you have questions about your health.
- Avoid using a gasoline engine indoors. You could expose yourself to carbon monoxide, which can kill you or make you very ill.

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## Salvaging Household Items

*When in doubt, throw it out!*

### If you have wet carpeting:

- Pull up waterlogged carpet **immediately**, to prevent any further floor damage.
- Carpet pads **cannot be saved** - they must be removed and discarded.
- Attempt to save carpets or throw rugs only if they would be very expensive to replace.
- Clean and dry your floors (and sub-flooring) thoroughly before recarpeting.

### If you have wet floors or woodwork:

- Remove any moisture or debris;
- Scrub floors and woodwork within 48 hours, using a stiff brush, water, detergent and disinfectant (See "Use of Bleach"); and
- Allow all wood to dry thoroughly

### If you have wet furniture:

- Discard upholstered furniture if it has been exposed to water or contaminated material;
- Clean, rinse and disinfect wood furniture; and
- Place wood furniture outside in a **shady** area so it will dry slowly.

### Use of Bleach to Kill Mold

If any materials are still wet or moist after 24-48 hours, you should assume they have mold growing on them. Disinfect floors or wood surfaces using a solution of ¼ - ½ **cup bleach in a gallon of water**. If mold has already begun to grow, use a stronger solution – approximately ½ **gallon of bleach to a five-gallon** pail of water in a well-ventilated area.

## Food Safety

Discard items in soft packaging or screw-top glass bottles that may have touched floodwater, or been in contact with contaminated material. Commercially canned goods in metal cans or rigid plastic can sometimes be saved. See "Disaster Quick Tips: Basic Food Safety"

**More MDH fact sheets are available at:**

[www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/emergency/natural/floods/factsheets.html](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/emergency/natural/floods/factsheets.html)

This fact sheet includes information provided by the Minnesota Extension Service.

## MDH District Offices

Bemidji	218-308-2100
Duluth	218-302-6166
Fergus Falls	218-332-5150
Mankato	507-344-2700
Marshall	507-537-7151
Metro	651-201-4500
Rochester	507-206-2700
St. Cloud	320-223-7300

## MDH Environmental Health Flood Information

[www.health.state.mn.us/floods](http://www.health.state.mn.us/floods)

## MDH Environmental Health Contacts

[www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/contacts](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/contacts)

## Asbestos

Asbestos and Lead Compliance:  
651-201-4620

[www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/asbestos](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/asbestos)

## Carbon Monoxide and Mold

MDH Indoor Air Quality:  
651-201-4601 or 800-798-9050  
E-mail: [health.indoorair@state.mn.us](mailto:health.indoorair@state.mn.us)

[www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/air](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/air)

## Cleaning Up and Food Safety

MDH Food, Beverage and Lodging:  
651-201-4500

E-mail: [health.foodlodging@state.mn.us](mailto:health.foodlodging@state.mn.us)  
[www.health.state.mn.us/foodsafety](http://www.health.state.mn.us/foodsafety)

## Public Drinking Water

MDH Drinking Water Protection:  
651-201-4700

E-mail: [health.drinkingwater@state.mn.us](mailto:health.drinkingwater@state.mn.us)  
[www.health.state.mn.us/water](http://www.health.state.mn.us/water)

## Wells and Well Water

MDH Well Management:  
651-201-4600 or 1-800-383-9808  
E-mail: [health.wells@state.mn.us](mailto:health.wells@state.mn.us)

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/wells>

**If you require this document in another format such as large print, Braille, or cassette tape, contact 651-201-5000 or 1-800-657-3908. For deaf or hard of hearing TTY: 651-201-5797**