

 West Lothian Council	Environmental Health		SUBJECT: Clearing Up after a Flood
		Food Safety/Food Hygiene	NUMBER: PH04
REVISED: 25/08/08		Health & Safety	
	✓	Public Health	KEYWORDS:
STATUS: PUBLIC ADVICE		Pollution Control	FLOOD
		Pest Control/Dog Warden	HEALTH

Information Sheet PH04 Clearing Up after a Flood

The flood water affecting your home may have been contaminated with sewage and other contaminants. Although this would be very diluted and present a low risk it is still advisable to take certain precautions when dealing with the problem as below:

Cleaning up the house after the flood

- Cover open cuts and wounds on exposed skin with a waterproof plaster or dressing.
- Remove all soft furnishings and fittings that are damaged beyond repair.
- Remove all dirty water and silt from the property as much as possible, including out of the space under downstairs floorboards if you have these. This may require pumping out.
- Wash down all hard surfaces with hot soapy water several times until visually clean.
- Use a domestic disinfectant, following manufacturers directions as to concentrations, to wash over all hard surfaces after cleaning. Do not use strong chemicals such as caustic soda or industrial cleaners as these could pollute rivers and streams
- Food preparation surfaces and storage cupboards, refrigerators etc should be washed down with food safe disinfectants such as Milton, Dettol or similar.
- Allow to thoroughly dry - this will also help to destroy any germs left behind.
- Heating and good ventilation will assist the drying process.

Clothing and bedding

Clothing, bedding and other soft/fabric articles including children's toys etc should be laundered on a hot wash (60°C and above) which will destroy any germs that may be present. Other soft furnishings that have been contaminated and cannot be put in a washing machine will have to be professionally cleaned or if this is not possible may have to be disposed of.

Other Contaminants

If the flood water contained oil, diesel etc this should in the main be removed with the flood water and silt. Any remaining oil, diesel etc contamination in accessible areas can be removed by using a detergent solution and washing the surface down after initial cleaning has been carried out. In inaccessible areas such as under floorboards it may present an odour problem but is not necessarily a health hazard.

Returning to Your Home

It is recommended that you only fully re-occupy your home once the above cleaning has been carried out. There may be additional works to be carried out eventually as advised by your insurance company, housing officer, landlord, builder etc. If you decide to return to your home before this further work is completed you should:

- Try to have some heating on at all times and consider the use of a dehumidifier.
- Ensure the property is well ventilated. Leave windows open as much as possible. Remember security though!
- Ensure that if you have air bricks to any under floor spaces that these are unblocked to give cross ventilation to these areas.

Food Preparation and Storage

- Ensure all surfaces that food will come into contact with are sound and disinfected as above. If work tops and other areas show signs of damage, avoid food contact with these areas. Particularly make sure that shelves including in your refrigerator where food is stored are cleaned and disinfected.-
- Try to keep any opened food in an enclosed box or tin.
- All crockery, pots and pans should be thoroughly washed with very hot soapy water before using. If any of these are badly chipped or damaged do not use. You could also use a food safe disinfectant eg. Milton to sanitise them after cleaning.
- Take particular care in preparing food, always wash your hands before starting

Water safety

To report any problems with the main public foul and most surface water drainage systems contact Scottish Water (0845 601 8055)

- Ensure the water taps are cleaned and disinfected before using them for the first time. Water quality is unlikely to be affected. However, any concerns should be directed to Scottish Water, (0845 601 8055).

Other Health Issues

If you follow this basic advice you should not experience any additional health problems. It is possible that the 'stress' caused by the incident may well make you feel unwell in some way. This does not necessarily mean that you are suffering from any infection or disease. However, if you are concerned, visit your own doctor, who can also arrange counselling for you.

While in the property floorboards, walls etc will continue to dry out. Any loose material and dust resulting from this should be vacuumed up on a regular basis.

Very young children should avoid playing directly on timber floorboards or any damaged tiled floors if possible. Be aware of the risk of injury from sharp edges on tiles or raised nails in the floorboards until these have been repaired.

Gas Safety

If you smell gas call Transco on 0800 111 999 immediately.

Flood water could have affected the safe operation of your gas appliances. The appliances may light and appear to work as normal but the flue or ventilation systems – which are essential for normal operation – may have been affected by the flood water.

You should get appliances checked by someone who is CORGI registered.

Electricity

Switch off all electrical appliances if they are likely to have been affected by water.

Do not operate electrical equipment if it is in water or you are standing in water.

Remain away from live equipment if it is submerged in water.

Have all appliances and internal wiring checked by an approved electrical contractor (e.g. member of NICEIC). Check yellow pages for numbers.

Remember

DO

- Wash your hands properly if you have been in contact with flood water or silt. Take particular care when preparing or eating food.
- Contact your insurance company (if relevant) and make an inventory list of all damaged goods, including food. If you can, take photographic or video pictures.
- Put contaminated flood-damaged food in plastic refuse sacks, seal and put out when your next refuse collection is due. Check with insurers before disposal. If there are large quantities then you will have to check with the council's cleansing service about how best to dispose of this amount of waste. (01506 777800)
- If you accidentally ingest (swallow) mud or contaminated water and you become ill contact your doctor and tell him your house was flooded.
- Replace manhole covers dislodged by the flood.

DON'T

- Don't be tempted to try and salvage damaged food - including tins as they may be contaminated with sewage or chemicals left from the flood water.
- Don't switch on electrical appliances, which have been in contact with the flood water unless a competent electrician has checked them.
- Don't eat garden or allotment vegetables that have been covered by floodwater. Leave undamaged vegetables in the ground for at least another 2 weeks and then only use them after thorough washing and cooking.
- Don't let your children play on affected gardens and play areas until they have been cleaned and restored to their normal condition. Sunlight and soil help to destroy harmful bacteria and any excess risk to health should disappear completely within a week or so.

Additional Repair Works

Eventually other necessary works may have been identified by your insurers, builders etc. These will possibly be carried out after the property has substantially dried out. However if plaster walls and partitions have been affected badly and do not dry out in a sound condition the plaster and boards affected will have to be removed, walls dried out and re-plastered. Otherwise redecoration of sound walls is all that will be necessary.

Any areas showing signs of mould should be treated - fungicidal products are available from DIY Stores. We have a further Information Sheet on dealing with mould and dampness if you need further advice.

After about six months it would be advisable to check timber floors for any evidence of rot or shrinkage. Any necessary repair work can then be made.

Fitted units, particularly in the kitchen, made of chipboard may not dry out well and will become damaged by absorbed water. Sanitisation of these is difficult and therefore may have to be eventually replaced.

Check for structural damage to your property and if you think there is damage or danger seek advice from your insurers, builder or building control officer.

More Information

More detailed information can be found in a Health Protection Scotland leaflet, available on their web site at <http://www.documents.hps.scot.nhs.uk/environmental/guidance-notes/flooding.pdf>.

If you find that you need more advice, please do not hesitate to contact Environmental Health on 01506 775400 or environmentalhealth@westlothian.gov.uk, and we will try to help.