



# Flood Recovery **ANSWERS**

SDSU *SDSU Cooperative Extension Service*

## **Cleaning Wet Carpet After A Flood**

You can assume that flood water -- and your carpet -- has been contaminated with infectious organisms. You should wear rubber gloves when handling sewage-contaminated carpet. Make sure to continue to wash your hands with soap and water during the process of handling the carpet.

If carpet has been submersed in sewage-contaminated flood water lasting for days or weeks the carpet may need to be discarded. Even with your best efforts, wet carpet will be difficult to clean and it will be a challenge to prevent mildew and odor problems.

### **Carpet Clean Up Steps:**

1. If it's not glued down, roll up the carpet and take it outside to a driveway, patio, or garage floor. Be careful not to puncture your skin with carpet tacks or staples if you must pull up wall-to-wall carpet. Skin wounds put you at greater risk of infectious disease. Once outside, lay the carpet flat on a dry concrete area, such as a driveway, patio, or garage floor, preferably in full sun. A sloping driveway would be the best choice.
2. Use a garden hose with a strong spray nozzle. Start at one end and "sweep" the carpet with water. Do this once. Turn it over and hose the back side. Then "sweep" the face with water again.
3. Pour on an all-purpose liquid ammonia or pine-based cleaner and let it soak a few minutes. (Do not use full-strength ammonia.) Check ingredient labels on brand name products. Your carpet may change color or fade after contact with these cleaners.
  - ◆ Bleaching may further reduce staining of your carpet, but it will not ensure that it is microbe free. Be warned that bleach will probably change the carpet's color, because carpet dyes are not designed for bleach resistance.
  - ◆ Mix a solution of 1/2 cup liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water (2-1/2 cups per 5 gallon bucket). You may need more or less than 5 gallons depending on the size of your carpet. Remember, full-strength bleach will dissolve wool fibers and may irritate your skin. While the carpet is still wet, dribble the bleach solution over one section of the carpet. Wear rubber gloves and use a plastic brush to rub it into the carpet. Let it set for about five minutes, then rinse again with the hose. You don't want residual bleach left in the carpet, so rinse thoroughly.
4. Rinse thoroughly until all of the cleaning foam has been removed. You **MUST** rinse before any bleaching to remove stains to avoid producing toxic fumes that result when bleach and ammonia are mixed.
5. Dry the carpet as quickly as possible to help avoid mildew.
  - ◆ Use a wet-and-dry vacuum to pull water out of the carpet.
  - ◆ Place the carpet in full sun. Turn it over occasionally to speed drying. If you have to leave the carpet outside in the rain, it won't be further damaged as long as it is left flat.
  - ◆ If you need to dry the carpet inside, run the central air conditioner and dehumidifiers to help remove moisture. Fans also will help to circulate the air, but they won't remove moisture.

6. Try cleaning a glued-down carpet in place before you attempt to pull it up, because the foam backing probably will be pulled apart . This method should ONLY be tried if your room has slightly sloped concrete floors and a working drain as many basements do.

- ◆ Use a wet-and-dry vacuum to suck up as much water and mud as possible if you have electricity. Do not let electrical cords get wet. If no power equipment is available, use a garden hose with a strong spray nozzle to flush out mud and water.
- ◆ Start at the end farthest from the drain and follow the steps listed under "Clean-it-yourself outside." "Sweep" the carpet with water moving in the direction of the drain. (Obviously, you can't turn over the carpet and hose the backside.)
- ◆ If cleaning is not successful or if the carpet gets mildewed, the only alternative is to tear out the carpeting. If the foam backing gets torn in the process, it may be possible to tear off all the backing to salvage the carpet face. The age of the carpet and the effectiveness of the original glue-job affect the result in this case. Your carpet may tear apart completely and not be salvageable

7. If the carpet is too heavy to move, lift it off the floor and prop it up on saw-horses, old chairs, or other supports to drain. It may be light enough to move outside after it drains. Don't let your carpet dry this way if you want to save it, or it will be stretched out of shape and won't be flat when dry.

8. Remove the spongy pad underneath. It will hold water and begin to stink. Carpet padding is cheaper to replace than carpet; it probably is not salvageable.

9. After you have taken up the carpet and pad, then clean the floors with detergent solution and bleach before dealing with the carpet, so you can minimize odor and mildew in the house.

### **Clean the carpet professionally**

1. Consult a professional cleaner, describing your damage. They can advise you if your carpet is worth saving. If so, they may be able to come to your home and pick up your carpet at no extra charge. Otherwise, you can take it to them. Professional cleaners charge by the square foot or the hour. Get a cost estimate before you order the service.

2. A steam cleaning (hot-water extraction) method is preferred. Professional cleaners will apply chemicals to help sanitize the carpet. They will return it to you dry, but your home must be ready for it.

### **Prevent mildew**

1. Be sure the carpet is thoroughly dry before returning it to the house.

2. Clean floors thoroughly before putting carpet back into place.

3. Dry out the basement as much as possible. Run a dehumidifier and air conditioner to help remove moisture.

4. Close windows on the house if outside air has high humidity. If outside air is drier, open all doors and windows.

5. Run fans to circulate air in tight places, such as closets.

*Adapted from Iowa State University Cooperative Extension Service*

*<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/disasterrecovery/info/wetcarpet.htm>*



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## Care of Accent or Throw Rugs After a Flood

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If they are wet, hose them off to remove mud before you put them in the washer. Machine wash them in strong detergent and hot water. Adding 1/2 cup all-fabric bleach per wash load will help reduce odor in the rugs. Most washing machines will hold two small (24 x 35 inch) rugs. Larger rugs can be washed in larger washers at laundromats.

Line drying, preferably in the sun, is best. If the rug has a non-skid latex backing, low temperature drying for a short time is possible, but avoid high heat or the rubber will start to deform, melt, and make a mess in your dryer.

If the latex backing on a throw rug was worn and beginning to peel off before the flood, the rug may not be worth cleaning. The backing probably will flake off in the washing machine. Non-skid latex backings deteriorate with time and normal use under normal circumstances.

*Adapted from Iowa State University Cooperative Extension Service*

*<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/disasterrecovery/info/accentrugs.htm>*