

Damage ~ Water

Water damage, whether from fire-fighting, flooding, burst pipes or other mishaps, can ruin clothing and other fabrics. Water damage is not always immediately visible, but can worsen in a short amount of time. Bacteria, mold, and mildew can begin growing in wet or damp items, so it is important to begin restoration as soon as possible.

The success of restoration efforts depends on what kind of water affected the items and how long ago the damage occurred. Waiting more than 72 hours significantly reduces the likelihood that the items can be restored. If you do not have time to wash soiled clothing right away, or if your washing machine / laundry room was also affected and cannot be used, take the items to a professional dry cleaner. Dry-clean-only items that have been water damaged can usually be restored by a regular dry cleaning as well.

Kinds of water damage

In cases of severe flooding, no matter where the water came from, it has probably come into contact with many other substances present in your home and surrounding areas. For this reason, it is important to be careful handling water damaged items that are still wet. Wear gloves or wash your hands with clean water and soap after handling them.

Clean water:

Clean water is water that has no contaminants or organic matter in it. If your clothing was damaged by water from a fire hose, broken water line, clean toilet, sink, bathtub, or rain/snow/ice, then it has clean water damage. However, if water that was originally clean has been left standing for more than 48 hours, it may become grey water.

Grey water:

Grey water is water that has biological organisms, contaminating chemicals, dirt, or other organic matter in it. It may have a cloudy appearance and would be unsafe for human consumption. Examples of grey water are used laundry or dish water, toilet water with urine but no feces, fish tank water, and water from a water bed. Because grey water may have microorganisms and bacteria already in it, it can quickly become black water.

Black water:

Black water is water that is contaminated and unsanitary. It may not always appear "dirty," so it is important to know the source of the water. Flooding from sea, river, and lake water is classified as black water because of the presence of microorganisms and unknown chemical pollutants. Sewage water is also black water. Items that have been heavily damaged by black water should probably be discarded, but always check with a dry cleaner to see if they can be restored.

Tips

Thoroughly dry water-damaged items outdoors or on a drying rack in a clean room. Putting the items in a dryer will set in unpleasant smells, black mildew spots, and other stains.

Machine-washable items with mild damage can be washed with laundry detergent and vinegar to help kill germs and neutralize odors.

Contact a professional water-damage restorer or dry cleaner for items that are not machine-washable or are severely damaged.

Removing mold / mildew from machine-washable items

- If garments are still wet, lay in the sun to dry. Dry heat and light help to kill mold. If your item is labeled dry clean-only, take it to a cleaner after it is dry.
- If your item is washable, fill washing machine with warm water and regular amount of detergent. Add ½ cup borax and let mildewed garments soak in this solution for up to 4 hours.
- Run regular wash cycle.
- If garments still show signs of mildew, do not put in dryer. Apply a mixture of lemon juice and salt to mildew spots and dry in sunlight.
- Machine wash again.