

Kent County Health Department

Cleaning Up The Mess – After the Flood or Sewage Back-up



HEALTH
DEPARTMENT
Caring today for a healthy tomorrow

If flood water or sewage leaks into your home, you must clean and sanitize as soon as possible. **Because sewage contains disease-causing organisms, keep children, people with weakened immune systems, the elderly, and pets out of the contaminated area.**

Clean and Sanitize

1. Wear rubber gloves, goggles and boots at all times. Protect any wounds from contact with sewage. Avoid tracking sewage into clean areas.
2. Remove all flood waters and sewage by draining and pumping.
3. Remove all soil and sewage with shovels and wet vacuums. Clean and sanitize all tools and machines after use.
4. Remove all highly absorbent items like carpet and padding, mattresses, and upholstered furniture. These items should be bagged in plastic or labeled as contaminated with sewage and disposed of properly.
5. Wash down all walls, floors and surfaces with clean water and a low-suds detergent. Rinse with warm water. All saturated drywall and insulation should be inspected to determine whether removal is required.
6. Sanitize all surfaces by rinsing for 15 minutes with 8 tablespoons of chlorine bleach per gallon of water used.
7. Open windows and use fans and dehumidifiers to dry out the area.

Safe Water Supply

Water from wells that have been flooded should be considered unsafe and should not be used for drinking, cooking, brushing teeth, dish washing or clothes washing. **Well water should not be used until it is tested and found safe to drink.** Water testing sample bottles are available from the Kent County Health Department Laboratory.

If your water well has been contaminated with chemicals, methods below do not apply. If you **must** use some of the well water and the water is clear:

- ✓ Boil it for 10 minutes, **or**
- ✓ Add 8 drops or 1/8 of a teaspoon of unscented liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of clear water. Mix and let the water stand for 30 minutes before use. The water will be safe for drinking, but a chlorine taste may be noticed.

A safer option would be to use city water outside of the contaminated area or bottled water until your well water has been tested.

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Utilities

The following guidelines should be followed when entering a flooded area with gas and/or electrical utilities:

1. Call your utility companies and have them shut off the gas and electricity before you enter the flooded area.
2. **Do not** light matches until the gas company has confirmed it is safe. If there is a gas leak, it could cause an explosion.
3. **Do not** touch the fuse box or any plugged-in cords or appliances until the electricity is shut off. Touching these could result in electrocution.
4. If an electrical appliance motor or control panel is under water, **do not** start the appliance until consulting with the service company.
5. **Do not** relight gas appliances until checked by the gas company. Make sure all pilot lights are on before relighting burners.

Foods

Foods that are contaminated can make you and your family sick.

1. Throw away all food items that have been in contact with flood waters. This includes items stored in paper, cardboard, cloth, and similar food containers and/or has screw-caps, snap lids, crimped caps (soda bottles), twist caps, flip tops, or is home canned.

2. Throw away any canned foods that are bulging, opened, dented/crushed or are damaged or has rusty.
3. Commercial canned goods or commercial sealed pouches may be kept if cleaned thoroughly. To clean containers:
 - ✓ With gloved hands, remove labels, and wipe away dirt or silt. Scrub items with soap and water. Rinse thoroughly with potable water.
 - ✓ Soak in chlorine bleach and water for 15 minutes (1 ounce or 1 TBS of unscented bleach per gallon of potable water).
 - ✓ Air dry; do not towel dry. Relabel cans with permanent marker including expiration date.
4. Food stored in an unopened, full freezer will keep for 2 days after losing power (1 day for a half-full freezer) If your freezer cannot be started in 1 or 2 days, move the food to another freezer.
5. Meat that has ice crystals may safely be refrozen. If the meat is thawed, it is best to cook it and then refreeze it..
6. If food still contains ice crystals or is below 40°F, it is safe to refreeze or cook. If it has been over 40°F for more than two hours, then discard food. Do not rely upon color or odor for determining safety of food.
7. Place discarded food in a tightly closed container until pick up.

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Clothing and Bedding

Clothing, blankets, sheets and towels should be discarded unless they are washed and sanitized. Wash soiled items in the wash machine using hot water, detergent, and non-chlorine bleach. Dry washed items in the dryer. Afterward, clean and sanitize wash machine with 1 cup of liquid chlorine bleach on the hot rinse cycle.

Items that cannot be laundered like pillows or stuffed animals should be discarded. Discarded items should be placed in a tightly closed container and labeled as contaminated with sewage.

After clean-up, make sure your clothing is laundered, and your hands and body are washed with soap and warm water.