

Water Damage: What to Save and What to Throw Away

Whether you experienced a major event or noticed unexpected signs of water damage, it's important to audit your space and make note of what can—and can't—be salvaged.

Emily Fazio • Oct 16, 2024 2:15 PM EDT



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Water seepage can cause significant damage, especially if not addressed quickly. Whether the water intrusion is from a flood, frozen pipe, or other event, one of the first steps is deciding what can be salvaged and what needs to be discarded, and then committing to a drying process or remediation to clean salvageable items and eliminate mold spores.

"Any porous or semi-porous contents that come into contact with flood water should be evaluated, inventoried, and photographed before removal," shares Michael Herbst, AdvantaClean's IICRC (Institute of Inspection Cleaning and Restoration

(Certification) in-house instructor. The presence of water on anything that isn't a non-porous material, especially floodwater, is a health hazard as it can carry contaminants and promote mold growth; therefore, homeowners need to be cautious when handling their belongings and make informed decisions about what to keep and what to throw away.

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Not sure whether your drywall needs to be removed after experiencing water damage? Consult with a mold remediation company to determine if a bigger issue lies beneath.

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Items You Should Discard After Water Damage

- 1. Mattresses, box springs, cushions, and pillows.** They absorb water and can harbor mold and bacteria. Once wet, they're difficult to dry out completely and can become

moldy or smell perpetually like mildew.

2. **Upholstered furniture.** Waterlogged furniture can hold moisture, leading to mold growth.
3. **Clothing made of delicate fabrics.** Some clothing items can't withstand water damage or the cleaning process.
4. **Wall insulation.** Fiberglass insulation is very porous and needs to be replaced once it becomes saturated with excess water.
5. **Drywall.** Once wet, drywall loses its structural integrity and should be replaced. It's often necessary as crews assess structural damage and work to improve air circulation in a space.
6. **Wood veneer furniture.** While solid wood furniture can often be salvaged, water is more likely to permanently damage veneers with warping or bubbling.
7. **Plywood and particleboard furniture.** These materials swell, warp, and can break down easily once wet.
8. **Stuffed animals, soft toys, or cloth baby items.** These can become moldy and are difficult to sanitize or clean thoroughly.
9. **Rugs, carpets, and carpet padding.** These items absorb large amounts of water and may not dry properly. The backing on area rugs can deteriorate. Keep in mind that even thin carpet pads will trap moisture and encourage mold growth if not replaced.
10. **Water-damaged books, magazines, newspapers, and other paper documents.** Left compacted in **storage**, wet books and paper can warp and become a breeding ground for mold. Some restoration companies specialize in paper drying — consider it for your most valuable documents.
11. **Non-waterproof electronics.** Any electronics that aren't waterproof are likely to short-circuit or be ruined by water.
12. **Lamps with fabric shades.** The fabric absorbs water, making it hard to salvage.
13. **Cardboard boxes.** We get it, it might seem worth using once it's dried out, but chances are the moisture weakened the material too much for it to be worth your while.
14. **Curtains and drapes.** Depending on the material, these may not be salvageable if they've been soaked.
15. **Wooden picture frames.** These can swell and warp when exposed to moisture. Keep in mind that many picture frames are veneered wood over particle board, which doesn't hold up as well as heavier-duty wooden furniture or home accessories.

16. **Wallpaper.** It tends to peel and warp when in contact with water. Even vinyl wallpaper can shift and bubble. If the drywall or paneling must be removed, don't bother trying to save the wallpaper.
17. **Ceiling tiles.** Made from porous materials, these must be replaced if damaged by water. If not, you'll have water rings forever, and you know what I'm talking about.
18. **Paintings and artwork on paper.** While a professional restoration expert can work magic, most common artwork is not worth the effort.



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Understanding Homeowners and Renters Insurance Coverage

For anyone experiencing the aftermath of water damage, one of the most important steps is to communicate with your insurance provider and explore mold remediation. Whether caused by a storm, peril, or a slow-leaking broken water pipe, it's important to remove items that are wet to minimize risks to your home and health.

"Homeowners filing insurance claims should communicate with their carrier to verify coverage of non-salvageable materials before they are discarded," highlights Herbst. Homeowners and renters insurance policies may cover sudden or standing water damage, but coverage varies depending on the source of the water and the specific terms of the policy. Flood damage, in particular, often requires a separate flood insurance policy or additional coverage.

Before discarding any damaged items, homeowners should carefully review their insurance policy or contact their agent to understand what is covered. Insurance companies usually require documentation of the damaged items, so it's essential to take photos, create an inventory, and keep receipts if possible. Additionally, some insurance policies may require proof of the extent of the damage before making a claim, so following these steps can help make sure that you're reimbursed for your losses.



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