

Dealing with water damage

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Water, It flows through our homes every day, and we take it for granted as long as it remains safely contained within the pipes. But imagine coming home from work to find that a washing machine hose or an icemaker line has broken loose, or worse yet, returning from a two-week vacation to find that a pipe has frozen and burst in your absence. Now the water we take for granted has become quite a destructive force, insinuating itself everywhere and doing more damage by the minute as it soaks in.

No matter the source, water damage in your home or business is something that needs to be dealt with quickly and correctly. Improper or incomplete drying can result in a variety of unpleasant consequences, now and well into the future.

Most water damage situations, with the possible exception of floods and other ground water, are typically covered under your homeowner's insurance policy. But covered or not, you need to protect your home by taking whatever immediate actions you reasonably can to minimize the damage. This is what the insurance companies call "loss mitigation," and it is actually a provision of most homeowner's insurance policies.

What You Can Do:

Your first step is always to find and stop the source of the water. If the toilet or washing machine line is leaking, you can shut off the valve that supplies that fixture and stop the leak. If a pipe is broken, it will probably be necessary to shut the water to the entire house until the leak is repaired. Next, do what you reasonably can to minimize the water damage. This may be as simple as sopping up the water with towels, or using a wet/dry vacuum

to suck up standing water. Do not, however, take steps on your own if the water contains sewage, such as from a toilet backup. The bacteria in the water can be very dangerous and needs to be dealt with using proper protective equipment.

Also, as soon as possible, move contents above or away from the water, either by moving them to another room or by lifting them and setting plastic or even small blocks of wood underneath. Pay particular attention to cardboard and paper products, which absorb water very rapidly, and also to wood furniture. Much of today's furniture is made with a thin wood veneer over a core of particleboard, and this material also will rapidly absorb water. Another problem with contents is staining – metal furniture legs will rust and stain carpets, and antique furniture will often bleed stain and dyes onto carpet that cannot be removed.

A common mistake is to crank up the heat in an attempt to dry things out. Excessive heat can suck the moisture out of surfaces much too quickly, resulting in secondary damage such as cracking, splitting and warping. This is particularly true with artwork, antique furniture and musical instruments that have a very low moisture content to begin with. All of these items will absorb moisture more rapidly and are even more vulnerable to the effects of heat and rapid drying.

Professional Help

Another crucial element in any water damage situation is to get the help of an experienced restoration contractor as quickly as possible. In all but the most minor of water losses, getting a trained professional with the proper

equipment right away can make a huge difference in what can be salvaged. In any situation where there is a lot of water present, you will want to call the contractor out as soon as you have stopped the leak, then begin taking your loss mitigation steps while you wait for them to arrive.

In most situations, restoration contractors use high-speed, non-heated air movers to evaporate the moisture off the surfaces and into the air. Air movers may be placed under carpets or on top of hard floors, or the air may be directed into enclosed wall cavities or under cabinets using special hose attachments.

As the air movers evaporate the moisture off of surfaces, high-capacity dehumidifiers are used to remove it from the air. Professional dehumidifiers utilize special pumps and drain lines to then move the water they collect safely out of the building. This combination of air movement and dehumidification without excess heat will safely dry most surfaces, and can be used to salvage structural framing, carpet, drywall, wallpaper, wood cabinets and a host of other materials. Restoration contractors can be found in the Yellow Pages under “ Water Restoration,” “ Fire Restoration,” or in the carpet section. Your insurance agent will also have a list of qualified people available to recommend.