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## Critical Cleanup Tips for Homeowners, Renters and Businesses Dealing with Flooding from Superstorm Sandy



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As you address damage from Superstorm Sandy floodwaters in your home, apartment or business, Riverkeeper wants you to be aware of critical safety tips that could prevent sickness today and for years to come.

**AVOID MOLD: CLEAN NOW, CLEAN THOROUGHLY**

Federal, state and city health and environmental officials agree with our scientific experts, who believe that mold may be the biggest long-term problem most people face.

To avoid mold, remove standing water and dry indoor areas thoroughly. Discard anything that was wet for more than 24-48 hours, including mattresses, carpeting and rugs, upholstered furniture, cosmetics, stuffed animals, baby toys, pillows, foam rubber items, books, wall coverings and most paper products. Wash clothing used during cleanup separately from other laundry and with hot water and detergent.

For detailed cleanup instructions, see this [CDC Website](#) or [Fact Sheet](#) (Gwen, upload the "Cleaning Mold, Mildew & Bacteria" fact sheet from Sara's email). For additional tips, look to the NYC Department of Environmental Protection's [flood site](#). If you need professional help in the New York City area, the DEP recommends contacting an environmental contractor. A list of contractors in the New York City area is provided by the [Environmental Contractors Association](#).

**AVOID CONTACT WITH FLOOD WATERS**

We also want to reiterate that flood waters are likely contaminated with sewage and possibly with other hazardous pollutants. During the storm, as with any rain storm, sewage was discharged untreated from most New York City, Northern New Jersey and Hudson Valley sewer systems; the usual flow of sewage was compounded by power outages, storm surge flooding and other conditions that kept some plants off line after the storm. Today, nearly all plants in New York City and the Hudson Valley are fully treating waste and

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operating at full capacity. Exceptions include the Rockaway plant, discharging untreated waste to the Atlantic Ocean; and the Oakwood, Coney Island and Yonkers plants, which are either treating partially or at less than full capacity. The situation in New Jersey looks troubling, with hundreds of millions of gallons of untreated sewage still discharging daily into New York-New Jersey Harbor and Raritan Bay.

If you must come into contact with flood waters, wear gloves and other protections to prevent direct contact, especially with open wounds; wash frequently with soap, especially before eating or drinking; and keep vaccinations current. Do not smoke.

#### REDUCE WATER USE

Particularly if you live in an area where a sewage plant is compromised, including Westchester County's Hudson River towns, limit your use of water to essential needs like cooking and drinking (follow boil water directives if in place in your area). Follow the "if it's yellow, let it mellow" mantra to limit flushing of toilets. This will reduce strain on the plants while they aren't running at full capacity or treating waste thoroughly. Try to make these steps a habit—especially during rain storms—to reduce water pollution.

While Riverkeeper focuses on storm response critical to our core mission of protecting the Hudson River and our drinking water, we want you to be safe and well informed as you respond to flooding in your home, business or neighborhood. If you're fortunate enough not to have been affected by the storm, consider [how you can help others](#).

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# Cleaning Mold, Mildew & Bacteria

Mold, mildew and bacteria are common after water damage. If unchecked they can lead to sanitation and health problems. The walls, floors, closets, shelves, contents – every flooded part of your house – should be thoroughly washed and disinfected.

In most cases, household cleaning products will do the job if you use them correctly. Check the label on the products to see how much to use. Some products shouldn't be used on certain materials; the label will tell you that. Apply cleaner and give it time to work before you mop or sponge it up. Follow directions and all safety precautions on the container. After cleaning a room or item, go over it again with disinfectant to kill the germs and smell left by the floodwaters. You may also need to get rid of mildew, an unwelcome companion to moisture that shows as fuzzy splotches.

## Cleaning tips:

Tackle one room at a time. A two bucket approach is most efficient: use one bucket for rinse water and the other for the cleaner. Rinse out your sponge, mop, or cleaning cloth in the rinse bucket. Wring it as dry as possible and keep it rolled up tight as you put it in the cleaner bucket. Let it unroll to absorb the cleaner. Using two buckets keeps most of the dirty rinse water out of your cleaning solution. Replace the rinse water frequently.

## Walls:

Start cleaning a wall at the bottom or where the worst damage was. If you did not have to remove the wallboard or plaster, you may find that the wallboard or plaster won't come clean and you will want to replace it rather than clean it. If you have removed the wallboard or plaster, wash the studs and sills and disinfect them.

## Furniture:

Solid wood furniture can usually be repaired and cleaned, but wood veneer often separates and warps. Wood alcohol or turpentine applied with a cotton ball may remove white mildew spots on wood. Cream wood restorers with lanolin will help restore good wooden furniture parts. Upholstered furniture soaks up contaminants from floodwaters and should be cleaned only by a professional. This is also true of carpets and bedding. Unless the piece is an antique or especially valuable, upholstered furniture soaked by floodwaters should probably be thrown out.

## Cleaners

- 1<sup>st</sup> choice: Non-sudsing household cleaners
- 2<sup>nd</sup> choice: Laundry soap or detergent

## Disinfectants

- 1<sup>st</sup> choice: Commercial disinfectant or sanitizers, such as the quaternary, phenolic or pine oil based ones (Check labels for the contents)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> choice: 1 cup (8 ounces) of laundry bleach for 1 gallon of water

## Mildew Removers

- 1<sup>st</sup> choice: Commercial mildew removers or mildewcides
- 2<sup>nd</sup> choice: Washing soda or tri-sodium phosphate (available at grocery or paint stores). Use 5 tablespoons per gallon of water
- 3<sup>rd</sup> choice: 1 cup (8 ounces) of laundry bleach for 1 gallon of water. See below for using bleach.

## Bleach

Liquid chlorine bleach, such as Clorox or Purex bleach, can do a variety of flood clean up jobs. Make sure that 5.25% sodium hypochlorite is the only active ingredient. Bleach that has a scent to improve its smell is available. Scented bleach is fine for cleanup jobs, but don't use it for treating drinking water. Don't use dry bleach or any bleach that does not contain chlorine. Be careful of fumes and wear rubber gloves, protective eye wear and mask. Do not mix bleach with other household chemical products, especially ammonia or toilet bowl cleaner; the chemical reaction can create a poisonous gas. Do not use bleach on aluminum or linoleum.