



Flood Recovery **ANSWERS**

SDSU Cooperative Extension Service

After the Flood – Clean and Sanitize Textiles in Your Home

When flood waters subside, the mess that remains may include bacteria, mold and mildew in the textiles in your home. You need to clean and sanitize these items, as they must be cared for immediately.

- ◆ Liquid chlorine bleach (sodium hypochlorite bleach) is widely available and kills bacteria, mold and mildew. It is the preferred chemical for sanitizing most textiles in homes. **It is recommended to use one-half cup of liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water for purposes of sanitation.** However, it can change the color of many textile fibers. It is especially damaging to protein fibers such as wool and silk if it's in prolonged contact.
- ◆ Most clothes and washable textiles can be sanitized by washing with hot water and a heavy-duty detergent, bleaching with liquid chlorine bleach (one cup per washload), and drying with high heat and ironing. Non-colorfast items may fade or change color.
- ◆ If clothes are mud-soaked and wet, the first step is to rinse large particles out then soak in cold water to remove remainder of the muddy residue. If the washer still works, use the prerinse spin-out cycle before machine washing them in hot water. If the washer also is flooded, wring out as much excess moisture as possible. If muddy clothes have dried, brush off the crusty dirt before wetting them to wash them.
- ◆ For dryclean-only clothing, if garments are still damp, rinse them in clear water, then dry them out and take them to a drycleaner. If the garments have dried with mud on them, brush off what you can, then take the garments to a drycleaner. Drycleaning and steam pressing will sanitize these items.
- ◆ Don't leave wet clothes piled in a heap. The moist, warm and dark conditions in the center of the heap will be perfect conditions for the growth of mildew. Mildew is a growing organism that can permanently damage most textile fibers--especially natural fibers such as cotton, linen, rayon and wool.
- ◆ If outdoor lines are available and it is sunny, clothes can be rinsed and hung up outdoors to dry. Indoors, air conditioning will assist drying, but in its absence, dehumidifiers or fans may help speed the drying process. Drying clothes quickly, even with soil in them, will help prevent growth of mildew. Drying in the dryer will not only mess up the dryer, it will also set the mud and other stains, making them more difficult to remove.
- ◆ **Bleach should never be mixed with other chemicals, cleaners or household products, especially those containing ammonia, because an extremely deadly chlorine gas can form. These fumes are especially hazardous in small, closed spaces such as bathrooms.** If an area has been cleaned with other products, make sure the area is thoroughly rinsed with uncontaminated water before bleach is used. Wear rubber gloves to reduce your health risk when handling clothing and textiles that have been submerged in sewage-contaminated water.

For more information contact your local extension office.

Adapted from Iowa State University Cooperative Extension Service.

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/disasterrecovery/info/sanitizetextiles.htm>