

Make sure flooded house dry before rebuilding, experts say

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. - It is vital that people hold off rebuilding after flooding until wood and other materials in the home dry out, according to Purdue University experts.

Hasty renovation can trap moisture in wood, which may lead to rotting and mold growth.

"In past floods, we've found that some people don't wait until the house is properly dried out before adding new insulation and wallboard," said Steve Cain, Purdue disaster communications specialist. "Rebuilding too quickly after a flood can cause continuing problems such as mold growth, insect infestations, and deterioration of the wood and wall coverings."

The first step toward rebuilding is removing wall and floor coverings exposed to flood waters, including sheet rock, insulation, carpeting and possibly linoleum paneling or the subflooring, said Cain, President of Indiana Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster.

Next, fans and dehumidifiers may be used to help ventilate wet material and remove moisture from the air, said White County, Purdue Extension Educator Denise Schroeder, who helped Hoosiers recover from winter flooding earlier this year. Schroeder is secretary of Disaster Assistance Northwest Indiana.

Submerged wood will absorb a large amount of water. If enough moisture is trapped in the wood, mold is likely to grow behind walls and may cause people serious health problems in the near or long-term future.

"Our concern is about people's health," Cain said. "We know people want to return their home to normal as quickly as possible, but not if that causes long-term health issues."

It may takes weeks to dry out the house, Cain said. Before drywall, paneling or other coverings are put up, wood should have a moisture content of less than 15 percent. Do-it-yourselfers may be able to borrow or rent a moisture meter from a hardware store or lumberyard.

For severe flooding, you might want to have a building inspector or a professional, trustworthy contractor inspect the wood before rebuilding.

Ventilation is usually the best way to dry things out, Cain said. He advised people to provide an entrance and exhaust opening for air to promote cross-ventilation. He also suggested facing fans out of doors or windows before sealing the rest of the opening, thereby creating a vacuum to more effectively move air.

For more information on Flood Recovery, visit Disaster and Emergency Management Resources from Purdue Extension <http://extension.purdue.edu/eden/> and Dealing with Potential Moisture Problems after a Flood <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/disaster/factsheets/pdf/moisture.pdf>

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