

How to Dry Out A Flooded House

By JAY ROMANO

AFTER the recent heavy rains caused significant flooding along the East Coast, many homeowners may find themselves dealing with damp, soggy homes and furnishings.

"The most important thing to consider before going into a house after a flood is safety," said Ed Weingartner, the chief executive of Dynamic Restoration, a disaster-recovery company in West Chester, Pa. "If you had a significant amount of water in the basement, either call the power company and tell them to disconnect the service, or ask an electrician to check to make sure it's safe."

He said that since furnaces and some water heaters are connected to the electrical system, stepping into standing water in the same area could be dangerous.

In addition, he said, homeowners should be aware that if flood water comes from a river, it could contain sewage. "Bacterial content isn't necessarily an issue, but it could be," Mr. Weingartner said. Surfaces can be disinfected with a solution of one part bleach to nine parts water.

Once a flood has subsided, Mr. Weingartner said, the house must be dried out as quickly as possible. "Mold will start to grow within 48 to 72 hours," he said. Carpets, pads and

furniture that were submerged should be removed, and drywall that was soaked should be cut out and discarded.

Jeffrey Gross, a regional manager for Maxons Restorations in Manhattan, said there are three methods for drying out a wet house. The most basic, he said, is to get air circulating through it by using fans.

Another method that is faster and more effective, but more expensive, is to use dehumidifiers.

"Dehumidifiers are used to remove deep imbedded moisture," he said. "If you have a wood floor, or if the framing in the walls has been saturated, a dehumidifier will pull the moisture out of the wood."

And while it is helpful to leave windows and doors open when using fans to dry out a building, they should be kept closed when using a dehumidifier. "If humid outdoor air is allowed to enter the home, the dehumidifier will be fighting against the relative humidity outside," Mr. Gross said. He added that a dehumidifier in a closed room can reduce the relative humidity to a low of 20 percent.

"When the air is that dry," he said, "it will wick moisture out of the walls and floors."

Another way to dry out a house is to use the heating system along with the central air-conditioning system or window units.

"Warm air will hold more mois-

ture than cooler air," Mr. Gross said. So a homeowner can close all doors and windows and run the air-conditioning. Once the house has cooled and the air is dry, the air-conditioning should be turned off and the heat turned on.

When the temperature has reached, say, 80 degrees or so, the

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heat should be turned off and the air-conditioning turned back on until all the warm air has been removed. The cycle should be repeated until the house is dry.

Mr. Gross said that homeowners who use this strategy must monitor the process closely. "If you leave the heat on too long, you're basically turning your home into a greenhouse," he said.

Dr. Philip R. Morey, a spokesman for the American Industrial Hygiene Association in Fairfax, Va., said that if a house is not dried out quickly enough and mold begins to grow, the owner should take steps to eliminate it. "You need to physically remove the mold by scrubbing it off," he said. "You can use a strong detergent, and a little bleach wouldn't hurt, and make sure to wear gloves and an N95 respirator."

Such a respirator, he said, will filter out 95 percent of the mold spores and similar-size particles.

Additional information about mold is available on the association's Web site at www.aiha.org.

