

After the floods

Tips for owners, volunteers and contractors

By Jerry Tyrrell

There are enough problems¹ recovering from a flood besides confusing advice. The way forward may be tough, but let's not make unnecessary mistakes. So trust your family, friends and volunteers but make informed decisions when fixing your home or building.

• *know what is dangerous*² • *clean up carefully* • *air your building for as long as possible* • *delay your repairs and claims until you know how serious the damage really is* • *use durable and mould resistant materials and coatings* •

What to do

- ⇒ **ventilate** interiors and under floors – keep exhaust and ceiling fans on
- ⇒ **clean** interiors with as little water as possible
- ⇒ **remove** damaged linings and materials as soon as possible
- ⇒ **plan** repair works carefully – use this misfortune as opportunity to make changes or improvements to your building
- ⇒ **delay** any works until the minimum drying out has occurred
- ⇒ **seek advice** if you are uncertain about something important eg sagging ceiling, bowing timber floor boards
- ⇒ **do not pay** for complex or expensive work unless the quality is acceptable.

Avoid danger

- ⇒ do not allow **unsupervised children** in a flood damaged building
- ⇒ **electrical** – ask your electrical contractor or supplier to carry out a safety inspection before reconnection
- ⇒ wear **PPE** – personal protection equipment includes gloves, footwear, glasses and earmuffs/plugs
- ⇒ watch for **snakes**, spiders and rodents taking refuge in the building
- ⇒ **asbestos** – expect all pre 1985 buildings to contain fibro or other asbestos products.
- ⇒ DO NOT break, remove, drill or repair fibro unless you know it is not asbestos
- ⇒ check **stability** especially:
 - posts/basement walls
 - retaining wallsGet expert advice if any tall structure or retaining wall is leaning or bowing.
- ⇒ **termiticides** – assume soils under a pre1995 house contain toxic chemicals
- ⇒ water damaged paint will flake and peel - **lead** paints were applied until 1980 and dust and residue is toxic to children

Damage

There are no hard and fast rules about materials. However the following works in most cases.

Material, product or system	What to do	Who can help
Plasterboard	Remove linings which have been immersed in water to nearest joint above flood level.	Builder or plasterer
Particle board	Particle flooring is usually waterproof – assess when dry. Remove any swollen or saturated walls, cupboard or lining boards	Builder or carpenter
Non durable timbers	Replace pine or MDF (medium density fibreboards)	Carpenter
Floor boards	Most wet floor boards will expand and bow up. Over time they will shrink back but may squeak and need additional nailing or screwing.	Carpenter
Paint	Do not repaint unless the painter has checked moisture level. Wash down water affected surfaces with mould wash or similar compound Use mould inhibitors in new coatings.	Painter
Insulation	Remove cellulose, fiberglass or any crushed insulation especially if it is stopping the building from drying out	
Drainage	Most older stormwater systems may be full of silt. Ask plumber to camera or purge the line if any surcharge happens in light rain.	Plumber
Cavities and concealed areas	Cavities in brick and timber walls may contain silt. This will need assessment with fiberscope or by removing a brick or small piece of cladding. Clean slab edges and weepholes with high pressure hose if silt bridges dampcourse or termite barriers – do not damage dampcourse or flood cavity	Builder or bricklayer
Termite barriers	Remove all soil around bases of timber posts, stairs and walls. Expose edges of slabs.	Pest control company or gardener.

Getting help

Approvals – you will need to get approval from your local Council for any new work or major changes to the existing building. They should be OK with minor works, changes or improvements. But if you build outside the existing footprint of the building or could obstruct a neighbour's view you should talk to a local designer or architect.

Compliance – everything³ you repair or build must be to an acceptable standard. Otherwise it will cause you trouble in use or when you come to sell the property. So use experienced tradespeople (or their advice) for all work. A license is required for any building work (labour and materials) worth more than \$3,500 in Queensland and \$12,000 in NSW.

Technical advice – the best people for advice and assessment of damaged materials are experienced tradespeople Qld BSA [1300 272 272](tel:1300272272) and OFT NSW [13 32 20](tel:133220). For more complex issues such as structural damage you should engage a local structural engineer. Plumbers can comment on obstructed drainage systems and septic tanks. Building consultants can help you check the quality of major work or troubleshoot misunderstandings or mistakes with your contractor.

¹ no comment is made in this article about insurance claims or assessment

² disease and bacterial infections are not addressed in this article

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