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Stay Above Water with Flood Clean-up Tips from the IICRC

Las Vegas ó June 2, 2016 ó To the dismay of many homeowners and facility managers, heavy rains and strong storms during summer months can lead to flooding and water damage within facilities. To facilitate safe and speedy flood clean-up, the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC) offers its top tips for reducing property damage and limiting health risks once the water has settled.

“When flooding occurs, it’s important to react quickly but appropriately in order to mitigate the damage,” said Scott Armour, Chairman of the IICRC’s Mold Removal Specialist certification program and owner of Armour Applied Science, LLC. “The IICRC has two international standards, the S500 for water restoration and the S520 for mold remediation, which have been written by a consensus of industry experts and should be used as the basis for decisions and actions when cleaning up after a flood. These standards will help the homeowner and contractor assure the job is done safely and completely.”

Before entering a building where flood damage may have occurred, make sure it’s safe: check for electrical hazards and structural damage, and use proper protective gear like boots, gloves and respirators. Before you start any construction or repairs, check for common hazardous materials like lead paint and asbestos, which may require help from professional and State-licensed contractors.

Then, follow these tips:

1. Act quickly

The severity of damage escalates the longer water sits and building components and contents stay wet, so time is of the essence in the aftermath of a flood. In fact, mold will grow within 48-72 hours, so aim to start removing water and drying the environment within 48 hours. Have a list of professionals on hand to call, and understand your insurance policy, as some only cover mold damage up to a certain amount, while others don’t provide any reimbursement for mold.

2. Ventilate affected areas to prevent mold growth

Mold loves moisture and organic materials such as paper or particleboard. In order to mitigate or slow damage, open windows if weather permits and place fans inside of them

to keep air moving and maintain moderate temperatures. Work toward the fan as you clean to minimize cross contamination.

3. Assess damage to items and materials

Assess the type of water absorbed by items, such as rainwater, water from broken pipes, contaminated river water or bacteria-filled sewage. There are ways to salvage specialty items but the decision on whether to save or trash an item will vary depending on the dollar and sentimental value to the owner. It may not be worthwhile to salvage drywall, carpets and pads, mattresses, pillows, box springs and particleboard. On the other hand, it might be worthwhile to restore costly Persian rugs, leather couches and antiques or heirlooms. Wet clothing and many household fabrics may be salvageable through machine washing, and a 10-minute soak in detergent and hot water, to remove contamination and stains. The IICRC strongly recommends that in water damages where there are contaminants present (e.g., bacteria, sewage, mold) or where small children or immune-compromised individuals are present that an inspection be conducted by an appropriately trained restorer and remediator.

4. Expose pockets of saturation

Hidden and concealed pockets of saturation need to be opened for cleaning and drying. Layers between building materials hold water that must be discovered and removed or dried. On walls, find the water line and inspect at least a foot beyond it to make sure all damage, wet materials and mold are discovered. Remove and discard the damaged drywall and wet wall insulation. Wet carpets can usually be dried by professionals with the right equipment, but carpet padding, which is like a big sponge, should be discarded. Wood base trim and hardwood can also be saved with the right equipment if they can be accessed and completely dried on both sides. Remember to investigate concealed cavities such as behind walls, in mechanical spaces, under cabinets and furniture, and in crawl spaces.

5. Conduct a thorough cleaning

Durable, non-porous or semi-porous materials, such as studs and joists, hardwood flooring and vinyl products, can be cleaned with common cleaning products or specialized products with detergents. During cleaning, take care to protect areas that are unaffected by the water or mold. After a thorough cleaning of salvageable materials, a disinfectant solution may need to be applied in case of harmful bacteria from sewage, river water debris or even standing water that has gone bad. Professionals like water restoration and mold remediation contractors and indoor environmental professionals can help you decide what is best for your situation. Once you've cleaned the wet materials, conduct another round of cleaning. If you choose to vacuum, use a HEPA-filter vacuum to remove allergens, fine dust and spores.

6. Confirm drying before reconstruction

In order to prevent dry rot and structural damage, it's important not to reconstruct or cover wood and other wet materials until the moisture content has been adequately reduced. A water restoration professional can confirm proper drying before reconstruction.

Using the appropriate knowledge and equipment, IICRC-certified restorers can identify moisture sources, evaluate mold growth, contain damage, remove contamination and dry materials to restore a home or facility back to pre-loss conditions.

For more information about the IICRC or to locate a professional IICRC-certified restorer in your area, please visit www.iicrc.org.

About IICRC

The IICRC is a global, ANSI-accredited Standards Developing Organization (SDO) that credentials individuals in 20+ categories within the inspection, cleaning and restoration industries. Representing more than 54,000 certified technicians and 6,000 Certified Firms in 22 countries, the IICRC, in partnership with regional and international trade associations, represents the entire industry. The IICRC does not own schools, employ instructors, produce training materials or promote specific product brands, cleaning methods or systems. For more information, visit www.iicrc.org.

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