

# Flooding

## Who to contact in the event of a flood

Derry City and Strabane District Council is one of several key groups at work during and after a flooding event. Some issues which people think are the responsibility of the Council fall under the remit of other agencies.

To ensure the correct agency deals with your request for assistance report a flood coming from any source, e.g. river, road, gullies etc to:-

**Flooding Incident Line: 0300 2000 100**

## After a flooding incident

Always be careful when re-entering a property after a flooding incident. Flooding can weaken foundations and move heavy items into unstable positions. Have any electric, gas or fuel-based services checked by a professional before turning them on.

Take the following precautions:

- Assume all power lines are live. Check that the power in the property is off before you do anything.
- Check for the smell of gas and make sure the mains are turned off.
- When entering a room look at the ceiling for any signs of cracks or bulges. Wet plaster is very heavy and can pose a threat to the structure of a property.
- Do not enter a building that has large amounts of sediment either inside or lying against it, as the structure may be unstable.
- Be careful when moving around inside the property. Be careful when moving any debris and seek help in moving heavy or unstable items that could trap or crush you.
- Standing water can hide a lot of hazards. It can be a breeding place for micro-organisms which can be released into the air when the water is disturbed. These can potentially be a health hazard if inhaled.
- Remember that water can be contaminated – wash your hands with disinfectant if they come into contact with floodwater or silt debris.

**Remember to contact your Insurance Company as soon as possible after the flooding incident. They will advise you on what immediate action you should take. If possible, take photographs of the damage. Any carpets, furniture or other goods that have been removed from your home should be retained until your insurer has agreed that they can be disposed of.**

## Restoring your home after a flood

### Clean Up

Cleaning up your home after a flood is a big job, but if you follow the guidelines set out below you will be able to finish the job safely and efficiently.

- Make sure that the gas, electricity and any fuel taps are turned off.
- Temporary electricity can be hired, but adequate ventilation is vital, as generators can produce carbon monoxide. Let the engine cool before re-fuelling.
- Make sure any appliances that use gas are disconnected by a GAS SAFE Engineer
- Make temporary repairs to the roof if it has been damaged. Tarpaulin makes a good temporary covering.

### Some Dos and Don'ts

- Do open your doors and windows to ventilate your home.
- Do ensure your house is secured when vacant.
- Do unblock airbricks and vents.
- Do wash your hands with disinfectant, if you come into direct contact with floodwater.
- Do check external walls and the roof for structural damage before entering a property.
- Don't attempt to turn on any services until they have been checked by an expert.
- Don't eat any food that has come into contact with floodwater
- Don't attempt to move any heavy or unstable objects by yourself – get help.

## Restoring services

You must have an expert check your property's services before you turn them back on. The damage caused by the flood may not be obvious and switching on a service could be very dangerous.

### Electricity

An electrician will check the junction boxes, socket outlets, light switches and ceiling connections to ensure that there is no water trapped inside them. Modern wiring can withstand a short period of flooding but if your property was flooded for more than a couple of hours then you might need to replace the wiring in your house. Consider re-routing cables to drop down from above.

### Gas

Water and mud may enter gas systems during a flood. A registered GAS SAFE engineer can check all your appliances, as these may be dangerous, even if they appear to be working normally.

### Water

Mains supply water should not be affected by flooding but wash the taps and then run them for a short time to ensure that silt has not entered the system. If you suspect that your mains supply has been contaminated contact NI Water and boil water before use.

Check the pipe work in your house to ensure that it has not been damaged and check any insulation around the pipes and replace as necessary.

Water supplies that are not on the mains system, such as cisterns or wells, may be contaminated and should not be used until they have been tested over a period of time.

### Sewers

Drains and sewers are rarely damaged by floods but they may block and back up. Check this by flushing toilets and running taps. Report any blockages to NI Water as soon as possible. If sewer repairs need to be made, consider installing anti-backflow devices. If you have a private sewage system, make sure that there is no damage that could result in a health hazard. Saturated soils may interfere with its proper function. Do not use the system until the floodwater level has subsided. Service damaged tanks, etc. and have them inspected as soon as possible by a professional.

## Removing standing water

The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service may supply a pump out service, for which there could be a fee, or you could hire a pump from a DIY store.

Alternatively, you can hire a specialist water damage company to pump out the water for you.

- Drain water away in stages to avoid problems with water pressure on the structure of your property.

## Removing mud

- Shovel out as much mud as possible and use a hose to clean out the rest.
- If there is mud on the inside and outside of your walls, remove in stages so that the loading remains even.
- A high pressure hose should not be used to remove mud from your property.

## Cleaning and disinfecting

- Scrub surfaces with hot soapy water and a heavy duty detergent.
- Items such as soft furnishings, clothes and foodstuffs that have come into contact with flood water should be placed in rubbish sacks (tied securely) and disposed of.
- You will probably need to hire a skip to deal with all the refuse from your home. If you are making an insurance claim, do not throw anything out until you are told to do so by the insurance company.
- Alternatively, after seeking permission from your insurance provider, photograph items before disposal.
- All food preparation surfaces need to be cleaned thoroughly and disinfected.
- Allow all cleaned surfaces to dry completely as there are germs that can thrive in wet conditions.

## Don't forget security

There have been instances of looting in the aftermath of a flood and while it is important to ventilate your house, it also pays to be security conscious. Remember that burglar alarms may have been affected by the water and may not work.

Do not leave external windows and doors open when the property is unoccupied and make sure that it is properly locked when you leave. If necessary, cover any open or broken windows with security mesh.



## Drying

Air circulation is the best way to dry out a property and clear the air inside. Be patient and make sure the property is completely dry before you move back in.

## Drying the property

You can allow your property to dry naturally but that can take months. Forcing the drying process can speed it up, so that it only takes a number of weeks.

Whatever way you choose to dry your property, make sure that the moisture trapped within the structure of the property is removed. Sometimes the walls may feel dry on the outside but they are still damp internally. If in doubt, get a professional in to ensure your property is completely dry.

- In all cases, the earlier the drying process is started, the greater the chance of success will be – the first 48 hours are the most crucial.
- If your heating has been tested by a professional and is certified as safe to use, it can be turned up to help dry out the house. Keep the temperature at around 20 to 22 degrees centigrade. Excessive temperatures should be avoided as rapid heating may lead to cracking of the plasterwork, etc.
- Be aware that temperature alone will not dry your property. Air circulation and humidity are critical factors to consider.
- Good ventilation is essential for the drying process.
- If you are using a dehumidifier, keep external windows and doors closed, especially during wet weather.

## Repairs continued...

### Glass and windows

- Clean all windows and oil locks and hinges to prevent corrosion.
- Single glazing is unlikely to be affected by floodwater but check the condition of the putty, window locks, etc. to ensure that the window is secure.
- Double-glazed units should be inspected to ensure that floodwater has not eroded the edge seal. Check for mud and water trapped in the hollow windows and door frames. If there is moisture inside the glass drill holes at the top and bottom of the frame to drain it out. If there is condensation between the frames the unit will have to be replaced.
- Sash windows may distort and swell following a flood. Do not force them open as this can cause further damage.
- The swelling should reduce during the drying period. If it does not return to its normal size when the wood is completely dry, then it can be planed to fit the frame.
- Sash windows have to be opened to assist with drying the property then remove the beading and the opening sash. Temporary beading can be screwed into position for added security when the property is unoccupied.

### Insulation

- Insulation that has become wet must be removed and replaced as it loses its insulating qualities and inhibits the drying process.
- Fibre glass insulation is an irritant. If removing it, wear protective clothing.
- If you think that wall-cavity insulation has been damaged by flooding, seek expert advice before trying to remove it.



### Interior decoration

- Low-permeability wall coverings like vinyl wallpapers, gloss paint and tiling will hamper the drying process. Remove the wall coverings from at least one side of the internal walls to help speed up the drying process.
- Timber stud partitions may rot if not dried properly.
- Do not redecorate for at least 3 months after the walls have dried and any repairs have been done. Painting or wall papering too soon can result in blistering, mould or peeling.
- Staining may occur when re-painting with emulsion. This can be avoided by using an oil-based or stain block paint before applying.
- If your kitchen units are made of chipboard they will be severely damaged by flooding. Chipboard may expand, distort and lose its strength. It's also impossible to disinfect properly and should therefore be discarded.

## Other useful contact details

### Flooding Incident Line: 0300 2000 100

Flooding of NI Housing Executive houses and advice in relation to emergency rehousing should be directed to:  
NI Housing Executive 0344 892 0900  
NI Housing Executive Repairs 0344 892 0901 [www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk)

Rivers and watercourses related issues directed to the:  
Department of Infrastructure Rivers  
028 70342357/028 8225 4900

Reporting of issues on roads, footpaths or blocked gullies should be directed to:  
Department of Infrastructure Roads  
0300 200 7894/03002007891

Flooding of burst water mains or blocked sewers should be directed to:  
NI Water: Waterline 03457 440 088 [www.niwater.com](http://www.niwater.com)

Northern Ireland Electricity 03457 643 643 [www.nie.co.uk](http://www.nie.co.uk)

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service  
In case of emergency - 999 [www.nifrs.org](http://www.nifrs.org)

Police Service of Northern Ireland 101  
In case of emergency - 999 [www.psn.police.uk](http://www.psn.police.uk)

ABI (Association of British Insurers)  
Insurance Advice 0207 600 3333 [www.abi.org.uk](http://www.abi.org.uk)

National House Building Council  
0800 035 6422 [www.nhbc.co.uk](http://www.nhbc.co.uk)

Federation of Master Builders  
0330 3337777 [www.fmb.co.uk](http://www.fmb.co.uk)

Oil Firing Technical Association  
01473 626298 [www.oftec.org.uk](http://www.oftec.org.uk)

Royal Mail Re-direction  
[www.royalmail.com/personal/receiving-mail/redirection](http://www.royalmail.com/personal/receiving-mail/redirection)  
or at the Post Office

BT Faults 0800 800 150

Finding a registered technician for the inspection of gas appliance  
0800 408 5500 [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)

Department for Communities Financial Support Service  
0800 587 2750

Derry City & Strabane District Council  
Health and Community Wellbeing  
02871 253253 [www.derrystrabane.com](http://www.derrystrabane.com)



Derry City & Strabane  
District Council  
Comhairle  
Chathair Dhoire &  
Cheantar an tSrátha Báin  
Derry Cille & Strábane  
Districk Council