

## ASK THE INSPECTOR COLUMN FOR AUGUST 24, 2016

### HEADLINE: WE HAVE A WATER LEAK!..... WHAT DO WE DO?

Leaks from a water pipe, drain or your foundation can be very annoying and in many cases, expensive to repair. We usually think that fixing the leak, hopefully a minor one, solves the problem. Unfortunately in most cases it's only the beginning of a cleanup, be it large or small.

If the leak has caused some amount of water to enter your basement or other area, the first thing to do is disconnect the electrical supply to the affected area immediately. Water is a wonderful conductor and you don't need someone injured. Disconnect all electrical appliances and remove everything portable that has come in contact with the water. This means furniture, appliances and any electronic equipment. Remove all the water; a good wet/dry vacuum will be needed here. If you have the power off in the affected area it should stay off, use an extension cord to another area that has electrical power. Once you have vacuumed up as much as you can, go over the floor with a good string mop, twisting it dry, often. The greater the effort you make here will significantly reduce the time needed on the next step. Now bring in fans or large dehumidifiers. Most of the commercial rental companies rent large dehumidifiers used by disaster clean-up companies like ServiceMaster. If it's this time of year, keep your windows closed as the outdoor humidity will prolong the drying process.

Now start with the overall clean-up of the floor and walls, starting with the floors. If carpet was involved, the under-pad must go, too. If your floor is ceramic or other hard surface tiles that are glued down or set in quick set and grout, drying out should be sufficient. Laminate floors and any hardwood floors that are of the floating style installation should be removed. If your leak was in an area where the hardwood floor is part of the floor assembly it will take some time for them to dry out, this is why I recommend bringing in commercial dehumidifiers, as the sooner you get everything dry the better.

The next area to clean-up is the walls, in the event that water has done damage to them. If the water issue was caused by a sewer back-up, this will add to your clean-up. If the water issue was caused by a leak, then this stage may not be as time consuming. I suggest that you wash everything down to disinfect the area, floors and walls included. There are a number of good cleaners on the market that can be used here. Stay away from bleach, as the vapors are harmful. If there are areas where mold is a concern, bleach will not get rid of the mold

spores. If the walls are drywall, remove the drywall no less than 24" above the floor or affected area, expect to remove the insulation, too. In fact, everything within the wall cavity that has come in contact with the water will have to go. The wood studs should remain exposed and be allowed to fully dry out.

Once you have everything removed, dried out and washed, the next step is to prevent any chance of surface mold from coming back. There are a number of products on the market that can help here. One that I have not only heard about but seen applied is called Concrobium. The biggest reason I liked what I saw here was the fact the ingredients do not contain any chemicals. This mold control has been shown to eliminate and prevent mold from surfacing again after a proper cleanup. It helps reduce musty odors and can be used repeatedly, as needed. The folks at Concrobium have a patented solution using water and inorganic salts. This liquid dries on moldy surfaces and covers the existing mold spores, remaining on the surface you have sprayed it on. It is advertised as non-toxic and safe for pets, humans and any surface around your home. They do not recommend it be used on the exterior, however, as it will wash off unless the surface is really dry. This company makes a full line of mold prevention and clean-up products. Go to [www.concrobium.com](http://www.concrobium.com) for more information. These cleaners are for surface mold, only. Because they do not penetrate to stop mold, everything that is not dry or is wet and beyond view may still have mold.

Another product I have used is called MoldAway and, in confined areas where mold may grow, it is effective. These hanging packets are formulated to absorb moisture and help eliminate odors. In a closet, under a vanity sink or where pets rest are some suggested areas. I had golden retrievers for years and when they get wet, these packets hanging near the floor where they laid helped considerably.

While all of this information can be used for a reasonably sized water invasion issue, the larger conditions should probably be rectified by a professional disaster removal company like ServiceMaster or Paul Davis Systems. You should check your home insurance to confirm that you are covered for water invasion and damage, as this will likely be your first call should a major water invasion issue happen. A chat with your insurance broker, should it ever happen to you, will leave you with some consolation that you will get professional help and some peace of mind.

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