



## Cleaning up clothes and valuables after a flood

### Introduction

Red Cross has a long history in helping people before, during and after an emergency. The Red Cross Emergency REDiPlan Project aims to provide people with quality advisory information to help them recover from an emergency.

This information sheet is one of a range of products provided in good faith to assist people recover from floods. If you **do not feel confident** in undertaking these tasks you should always seek the advice of professional services.

Before undertaking these tasks you should always contact your insurer.

### Clothing and Linens

Items of clothing have a personal value for many people. Often they are thrown out after floods, when it is possible to restore them.

Even if your washing machine did not get wet, do not use it until you know that the water is safe enough to drink, that your sewer or septic is functional, and that your electricity has been checked by a **licenced electrician**. Ask a friend if you can use their washing machine and dryer.

Before you wash clothes in the washing machine, run the machine through one full cycle. Be sure to use hot water and a disinfectant or sanitiser.

Take clothes and linens outdoors and shake out dried mud or dirt before you wash them. Hose off muddy items to remove all dirt before you put them in the washer. That way your drain won't clog.

**Check the labels** on clothes and linens, and wash them in detergent and warm water if possible. Adding chlorine bleach to the wash cycle will remove most mildew and will sanitize the clothing, but **bleach fades** some fabrics and **damages** other fabrics. You can buy other sanitisers, such as pine oil cleaners, at the supermarket to sanitise fabrics that cannot be bleached.

If the label says "Dry Clean Only," shake out loose dirt and take the item to a **professional cleaner**. Furs and leather items are usually worth the cost

of professional cleaning. If you want to clean leather yourself, wash the mud off and dry the leather slowly away from heat or sunlight.

### ***Paper and books***

Valuable papers such as books, photographs, and stamp collections can be restored with a great deal of effort. They can be rinsed and frozen (in a frost-free freezer or commercial meat locker) until you have time to work on them.

A slightly less effective alternative to preserving an item is to place items in a sealed container, such as a plastic bag, with moth crystals.

Papers should be dried quickly when they are thawed or unsealed (a blow dryer will do). Don't try to force paper products apart, just keep drying them.

Photocopy valuable papers and records soon because substances in the water may make them deteriorate.

If a computer disk or tape has valuable information, rinse it in clear water and put it in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Later, you can take it to a professional drying center and have the data transferred to a good disk or tape.

### **A final reminder**

Remember, recovery is a long and sometimes tiring process. So you should make sure that you look after yourself. For further advice on looking after yourself, see our booklet ***Coping with a major personal crisis***

### **Further Information**

[www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au)

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