

# Preparing a Home That Will Be Flooded

Kenneth Hellevang, Extension Engineer .....

- ❑ **Follow advice of local utilities about turning off electricity, water and gas.** Local officials usually recommend shutting off the water and gas. If floodwaters are expected to be near the electrical entrance panel, call your power supplier to have the electrical supply to the house disconnected.
- ❑ **Shut off electricity to areas of the home that might flood.** Don't stand in water when turning off electrical power using circuit breakers or fuses. Use a ground fault circuit interrupter on any circuits if conditions are damp. A ground fault circuit interrupter can be added to an extension cord to turn off the power if an electrical fault occurs.
- ❑ **Move valuables and hazardous materials to locations well above the expected water level and away from dampness.** Move items such as irreplaceable family photos and videos, high school yearbooks, and important documents, such as tax records, insurance policies and household inventories.
- ❑ **Anchor fuel tanks.** A fuel tank can tip over or float in a flood, causing fuel to spill or catch fire. Cleaning a house that has been inundated with floodwaters containing fuel oil can be extremely difficult and costly. Sometimes removing the petroleum contamination adequately is impossible and the home becomes uninhabitable due to lingering petroleum vapors, which are a health hazard. Fuel tanks should be anchored securely to the floor. Make sure vents and fill line openings are above projected flood levels or seal them. Consider emptying the tank and filling it with water to reduce its buoyancy.
- ❑ **Plug basement floor drains.** Plugging drains prevents sewage backup and prevents rapid water removal that may lead to external water pressure damaging basement walls or floor. For more information, see "Plugging Home Drains to Prevent Sewage Backup" at [www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/ageng/structu/ae1476.pdf](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/ageng/structu/ae1476.pdf).
- ❑ **Remove or prepare appliances for flooding.** Shut off appliances at the fuse box or breaker panel. Freezers, refrigerators, washers, dryers and other appliances contain electric motors and components that may be damaged by water and silt. If high water is imminent and large appliances can't be moved, wrap them in polyethylene film, tying the film in place with cord or rope. The water still will get in, but most of the silt won't, so cleanup will be easier.
- ❑ **Consider removing the furnace.** Shut off the gas and electricity. Disconnect and remove the furnace to where it will be out of the water.
- ❑ **Leave the air conditioner unless guided by a technician.** The air conditioning unit contains Freon, which may settle into a basement, creating a health hazard, so it should not be removed except by a technician. Wrapping both the inside and outside units in plastic will reduce the amount of silt that may accumulate in it.
- ❑ **Consider removing the water heater.** Shut off the electricity, gas and water to the unit before removing a water heater to where it will be out of the water.
- ❑ **Water pressure will break basement windows.** Consider removing or opening the windows if flooding is imminent.
- ❑ **Water pressure may damage basement walls.** If the basement walls are not constructed of reinforced concrete and/or are incapable of withstanding the force exerted by soils saturated with floodwaters, allowing the basement to fill with water may protect the walls/foundation from structural damage by keeping the pressure similar on both sides of the walls and floor. You may want to contact your city or county engineer for advice.
- ❑ **Remove all porous materials.** Carpet and wall coverings such as drywall are much easier to remove when dry and clean. Solid wood can tolerate water, but pressed-wood products will be damaged and cannot be salvaged. Finishes don't provide a waterproof barrier, so even finished wood materials still are porous.

For more details about preparing for a flood, plus information about cleanup after a flood, contact your county office of the NDSU Extension Service or see [www.ag.ndsu.edu/flood](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/flood).



[www.ag.ndsu.edu/flood](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/flood)

June 2011