

Cleaning Flood-Damaged Carpets and Rugs When to Discard, Clean or Call a Professional

When faced with flood-damaged carpeting and rugs, your options will depend on the source of flooding. If floodwater consisted of clean basement seepage or lawn runoff into a sub-basement, drying and cleaning is an easy decision. If sewage-contaminated floodwater has covered your carpeting, you probably will need to discard it for health safety reasons. You can assume the water and the carpet contain infectious organisms. Throw rugs can usually be saved.

GENERAL RULES

Wall-to-wall carpeting, most large area rugs and any rug with foam backing should be discarded if flooded with contaminated water. Except for valuable rugs, the time and expense of professional cleaning generally is not worth the effort or the health risk. If you are determined to salvage carpeting soaked with contaminated water, consult a professional cleaning company that services carpets at its own cleaning and drying facilities. A steam cleaning (hot-water extraction) method is preferable. A wall-to-wall carpet soaked by clean rainwater can be salvaged. Have it professionally cleaned or clean it using the directions below. Throw rugs usually can be cleaned adequately in a washing machine.

CLEANING RAIN-SOAKED CARPETS

Cleaning basement carpeting indoors is not a good idea in summer because you are adding even more moisture to an already wet area. If the carpeting is installed with tack strips you may be able to remove it, have it cleaned and reinstalled. Padding is nearly impossible to clean so it should be replaced.

If you can't remove the carpeting, dry it as quickly as possible to minimize growth of mildew/molds and fungi. If possible, use a wet/dry vacuum system. A dehumidifier can help remove moisture from the air. Keep windows closed when using a dehumidifier.

When the carpet is thoroughly dry, vacuum the area. Shampoo and repeat the drying process. Keep in mind that most modern carpeting is made of nylon and should not be treated with bleach. Vacuum again.

You can reduce a musty smell with the following process:

- Sprinkle baking soda over the carpet, working it in with a broom or sponge mop.
- Leave the baking soda treatment on overnight.
- Vacuum the baking soda out. Vacuum twice, moving back and forth in a different direction the second time.

Information from: University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension, Iowa State University Extension, American Red Cross/Federal Emergency Management Agency.