

How to Salvage Flood-Damaged Appliances



Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

Cleaning Appliances

Water, especially dirty flood water, causes many problems if it gets into an appliance. If it gets into an electric motor, the windings, electrical contacts and switches may corrode or short out. If it gets into insulation, the usefulness of the insulation in keeping heat in (ranges) or out (refrigerator/freezers) may be less than it should, and odors may exist for years. You should also consider the fact that new federal energy-savings laws have forced the manufacturers to produce a much more efficient product. A new appliance may pay for itself in savings on your electric bill, especially if the manufacturer chooses to help you out on the initial cost.

First. . .

Before entering a home after a flood, be sure that the electricity to the dwelling has been completely shut off. If you are not certain how this is done, get a licensed electrician or authorized service man to do this for you. If there is still water surrounding the appliance, don't go near it until you are certain that the electricity to that appliance is off. Many flood-damaged appliances can be salvaged, but they must be thoroughly dried out first and should be checked out by an authorized service technician before being plugged in to an electrical outlet. Cleaning and sanitizing should probably await the electrical check—it may not be worth the time to clear up the unit. Move the appliance to a location where air can get to it and prop the doors open. You may want to set a fan inside or nearby to increase the air flow. Make certain that a small child can't get inside and close the door. The drying process may take a week or longer.

Don't Hose Them Down

Because your appliance may be mud- and water-filled, it may be tempting to hose them down. Don't do it! Water may get into places that the flood didn't reach, and you will only increase the damage. Instead, wash the appliance with a wet cloth and common household cleaners like Formula 409 or Fantastik. Rinse with a disinfectant solution (one teaspoon of chlorine bleach for each gallon of water) to sanitize and discourage mildew. Dry with a towel.

Getting Rid of Odors

If an odor persists, wash with a solution made by adding one teaspoon of baking soda to a quart of water or one cup of vinegar or house-hold ammonia per gallon of water. Activated charcoal (carbon), usually available where swimming pool or aquarium maintenance supplies are sold, will gradually soak up persistent odors. Place a thin layer in a large cookie pan and leave it there for 6 to 8 hours. It will then need to be re-activated by placing the pan in an oven, set at 350°, and leaving it there for approximately 1 hour. This procedure may be repeated indefinitely, as the charcoal never wears out. Refrigerators and freezers with wet insulation probably can't be salvaged. While older models with fiberglass cabinet insulation and metal liners can be saved by replacing the insulation, this is a high cost repair and the money might better be spent on a new, higher efficiency model. Cabinets with polyurethane foam insulation and seamless plastic liners resist water better, but once soaked, are not repairable.

Built-in Appliances

Built-in ranges, ovens, and dishwashers (not portable or free-standing) generally have a batt of fiberglass insulation wrapped around the inner cabinet, with no outer cabinet. This insulation can easily be removed and replaced if it has become dampened with flood water.

"800" Numbers for Appliance Manufacturers

Even though an appliance warranty does not cover flood damage, most appliance manufacturers have disaster programs and offer discounts on parts of a new product if an appliance is involved in a major flood.

Your extension agent has a list of "800" numbers for all major appliance manufacturers. Call the manufacturer if you have an appliance which was in flood water and see what they can offer you in the way of advice or financial help before you attempt to plug in the appliance.

Trade names are used to provide specific information; no endorsement is intended, nor is criticism of similar products implied.

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