
Water Damage Response Guidelines

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Idaho State
University

Environmental Health,
Safety, and Sustainability

Potential Safety Hazards

- *Mold Exposure* - Potential health effects and symptoms associated with mold exposures include allergic reactions, asthma and other respiratory complaints.

Definitions

- *Moisture Conditions* – One-time or ongoing water intrusion from leaking or burst pipes, damaged roofing or foundations, fire sprinkler activation, failed insulation, lack of proper ventilation, or other unforeseen events that cause the buildup or continuing presence of moisture in indoor spaces.
- *Mold Growth* – Mold, mildew, and fungi can grow and proliferate anywhere moisture conditions are present, creating a health and respiratory hazard. While these organisms are present in all indoor and outdoor air, proliferation in enclosed areas, or sustained growth indoors, can create toxic environments for sensitive individuals and can create sensitivities in previously unaffected individuals.

General Mold Prevention Guidelines

- Fix leaks and stop sources of moisture intrusion as soon as possible.
- Ensure insulation remains in good condition and areas prone to humid air are well ventilated.
- Keep HVAC drip pans clean, flowing properly, and unobstructed.
- Vent moisture-generating equipment (bathroom vents, pool exhaust, dryer exhaust) to the outside, where possible.
- Maintain low indoor humidity, ideally 30-50%, but at least less than 60% relative humidity.
- Perform regular building/HVAC inspections and preventive maintenance as scheduled.
- Clean and dry wet or damp spots within 48 hours.
- Provide adequate drainage and slope the ground away from building foundations so they do not stay wet.
 - Drains should be kept clean and free of debris.

Water Damage Response Guidelines

- *Initial Response:*

- Determine if the source of the leak is water, sewage, or gray water.
 - Infectious disease training is required prior to any work involving raw sewage or gray water.
 - When a raw sewage or gray water leak is larger than a small drip or trickle, a professional cleaning and sanitization contractor should be used for clean-up.
 - Assess the area for any electrical hazards:
 - DO NOT enter standing water until all electrical service to the area has been de-energized, locked and tagged out.
 - Appliances and machinery in the vicinity of the leak (in danger of contacting water) should be unplugged and locked out until the space has been thoroughly dried.
 - Stop the source of water intrusion if possible.
 - Remove all standing or puddled water, place wet floor signs if not carpeted.
 - **Contact asbestos services to determine asbestos concerns before disturbing any building materials.**
- *Sudden immediate release of water:*
 - If water release is to the floor, and has reached any walls, cove base/baseboards must be pulled back to assess drywall.
 - Many ISU buildings were constructed under previous codes and the drywall comes into contact with the floor behind baseboards and cove base.
 - If the water has reached the wall and the drywall is in contact with the floor, the drywall will need to be trimmed to prevent the moisture from wicking up and creating mold conditions inside the walls.
 - For water releases that impact drop ceilings, all wet ceiling tiles should be removed.
 - For water releases that impact hard ceilings or drywall, vent holes should be cut (typically one 5/8" hole every 14-16 inches throughout the water impacted area)
 - **IMPORTANT:** Ensure you are clear of any overhead pipes, electrical lines or IT equipment prior to drilling or cutting.
 - If the leak involves raw sewage or gray water, a 10% bleach solution should be used to disinfect all contaminated surfaces, with a contact time of no less than 15 minutes.
 - Take moisture level measurements of all potentially affected areas
 - Any areas above 25% saturation should be considered "wet"
 - Place additional vent holes if readings indicate additional wet areas.
 - Once saturated spaces have been opened and ventilated, fans and dehumidifiers should be placed in the space until moisture saturation readings are less than 25%.
 - *Chronic water leaks:*
 - Any areas that have been wet for more than 48 hours should be cut open to assess for any active mold growth.
 - If there is no active growth and the source of moisture has been stopped, the steps laid out for a sudden water release should be followed.
 - If active mold growth is observed, contact EHSS to help determine if a professional remediation team should be called in to address the issue and clean up.

Preparedness

Mold Awareness

- Recognize conditions that may indicate a potential mold growth concern.
 - visual evidence of mold growth, or
 - an unusual musty or earthy odor.
 - Staining on walls, ceilings, floors, furniture that may be caused by water releases or moisture build up