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www.mightymacclean.com

(843)842-3994

SEWER BACKUPS & SALT WATER

As discussed in the “Water Damage” bulletin, there are 3 categories of damage. Category 1 is fresh water (such as a broken pipe). Category 2, sometimes called “gray water” is slightly to moderately contaminated water (such as a dishwasher overflow). Category 3 sometimes known as “black water” is highly contaminated and dangerous to one’s health. It is important to remember that Category 1 water will become Category 3 water within a matter of days if not addressed. ***Cleaning up from a Category 3 loss is much more expensive*** than a Category 1 loss due to the risks and procedures involved and specialty products we must use to clean and disinfect contaminated areas including our trucks afterwards.

Raw sewage is considered Category 3 immediately.

Salt water intrusion is considered Category 3 immediately. While it is not the health hazard raw sewage is, salt water is highly contaminated and the salt is extremely difficult and expensive to remove.

Moving surface water, flooding, is considered Category 3 as well. However, minor flooding like we see on Hilton Head (where only a part of a room may have flooded), could be treated as Category 2.

As mentioned, Category 3 water contains bacteria that are dangerous to human health. Surfaces and objects contaminated should be ***thoroughly*** cleaned and treated with an appropriate antimicrobial before returning them to use. Carpet, Sheetrock and other absorbent materials may need to be discarded depending on the severity of contamination.

Unlike many other types of damage, sewer backups are especially troublesome because the areas you don’t see can be as important as areas you do see. The pile of rugs and carpets, as well as the padding provide breeding places that may not be reached by antimicrobials. Hidden recesses within walls, floors and under cabinets should be opened for drying and direct contact by antimicrobials.

Since objects may look “clean” while retaining harmful bacteria it is important that germicidal treatments be applied in a thorough and methodical way so that all areas are treated. It is important to allow sufficient time between applications for the antimicrobials to take full effect.

When children or pets are present, it is sometimes advisable to test after treatment to be certain that floor surfaces and furnishings have been restored to a sanitary condition. This can be accomplished by taking swab samples and incubating them in a culture medium to measure bacterial activity. Local health departments may provide this service to citizens.

The bottom line is sewer backups, salt water intrusions and flooding are very serious situations. Extraordinary caution must be taken at all times. A good thing to remember with Category 3 is “When in doubt, throw it out!”