

CHECK FURNITURE FOR FLOOD DAMAGE

Families whose homes are flooded may find damage to their furniture even where it was stored out of the water's reach. It's wise to check the furniture now, said Lois Warne, Iowa State University Extension art and design specialist.

The dampness and excessive moisture in buildings surrounded by water may have led to some problems similar to those where water actually reached the furniture. The moisture may have caused light or dark spots on wooden furniture.

Many pieces of old wooden furniture with natural finishes need only to be cleaned to restore them. If the finish is smooth—not alligatored—use furniture cleanser-conditioner to clean wood and restore natural grain and color.

Furniture cleanser-conditioner can be made at home using the following “recipe.” Fill a glass container one-fourth full of gum turpentine (not steam distilled) and three-fourths full of commercially prepared boiled linseed oil. (Do not attempt to boil linseed oil at home.) Cover tightly. This mixture can be stored indefinitely.

The moisture may have caused light or dark spots on the furniture. To remove white spots, Warne said, rub the surface with a cloth dampened with spirits of camphor. In application, rub with the grain of the wood. A liquid made from laundry bleach—three tablespoons of laundry bleach to one quart of water—will bleach dark spots. Apply the liquid to the dark spot, and let it remain for 15 minutes. Then rinse it off and repeat the process if necessary. White toothpaste can be used on dark spots if the stain is not more than a few days old.

Furniture that was under water or that absorbed lots of moisture is likely to warp, Warne said. Veneered furniture that is badly warped is a difficult problem to handle at home. Consult your furniture dealer about it.

Overstuffed furniture fabric can be cleaned successfully at home, said Warne. You can prepare the cleaning solution by dissolving one cup of soap flakes in five cups of hot water. Let it cool until it is in a jellylike form, then beat with an egg beater until it's frothy. Apply only the dry foam with a soft cloth or sponge, using a circular motion.

Dip a clean cloth in a pan of clean water, wring it out, and wipe all the lather from the furniture. Wring a second cloth dipped in another pan of clear water, and wipe the furniture again. Put the nap in the same direction. Faded fabric can be masked with a new slip cover.

If overstuffed furniture stood in water, it's likely that you'll need to clean any metal parts, Warne said. Remove rust with steel wool or sandpaper, and coat the metal with paraffin oil. If webbing or stuffing is decayed or odorous, the time to replace it is when the furniture is apart for cleaning.

Source: Iowa State University Extension Service