

[CLEANING](#)

BURST PIPE? FLOOD? HERE'S HOW TO CLEAN UP WATER IN YOUR HOME

Don't panic. Here's what to do



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Updated February 4, 2022

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It's been a brutally cold and snowy winter so far—and, we hate to be the bearer of bad news, but we've only just passed the midpoint of this winter season. Much of the U.S. is feeling the cold lately as **powerful winter storms** bring heavy snow, frigid temperatures and dangerous ice accumulations to millions across the country.

Cold and freezing temperatures aren't just uncomfortable—but they can spell trouble for your home and property, too. One costly way freezing temperatures can damage your home is by freezing your pipes. Pipes exposed to extreme cold—no matter metal or plastic—can experience immense pressure as the water inside freezes and expands, which can cause the pipes to burst. Once a pipe bursts, a significant amount of flooding can occur, which can cause damage to the structural integrity of your home, along with your precious personal items.

If a pipe bursts, it's important to address the water flooding into your home—fast. Before you begin, you'll need to make sure your home is safe to do so. If your home or area is safe to start cleaning up after storm aftermath or a recent pipe burst, here's what you should do to clean up before a professional service arrives.

If a pipe bursts, shut off your water immediately



Credit: Getty Images / Grigorev_Vladimir

If you're not sure how to turn off your home's water supply, call up a local plumbing service to see if they can guide you through it over the phone until they get to your house.

If you see the first signs of a pipe burst like leaking or flooding, newly formed puddles or water stains, or a change in water pressure in your faucets, act fast and turn off your home's water.

Courtney Wilkinson, vice president of Benjamin Franklin Plumbing, recommends says your priority should be locating the shut-off valve by your home's water meter. In many cases, the water meter is located in the basement or outside beneath a water meter grate.

Wilkinson recommends, "If you don't have a key, use some sort of tool [to open] where you can shut it off." You can grab a water key from a local hardware store, but if that's not an option, try using pliers or a screwdriver to get it open.

If your **water meter has frozen over** due to cold temperatures, don't panic. You can try to circulate warm air from your home into the room where your water meter is located. But, if nothing gives, you may have to wait for a plumber to get out to your home to help.

Turn off your home's power and gas

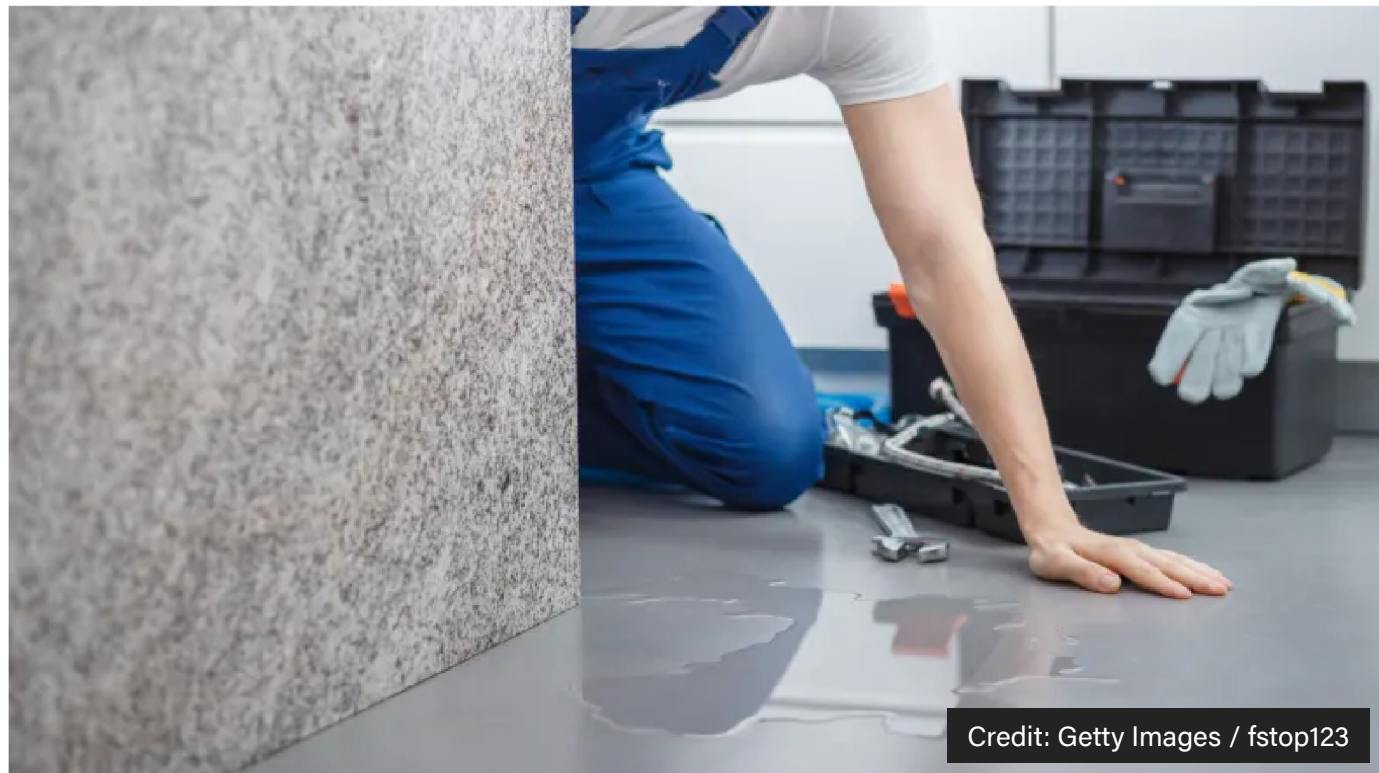
Instances in which water leaks through electrical systems connected to fans, light fixtures, or even electrical outlets can be a dangerous situation.

To be safe, Crow recommends turning off your home's power before starting any clean-up. "You [don't want to be] searching around water that can come in contact with an electrical source," he says. You should also shut it off even if you're experiencing a power outage, as there is always a possibility the power may suddenly return.

If you do have to enter standing water to access your home's main power switch, **the CDC recommends** calling in an electrician to turn your power off to avoid any risk of injury.

The experts at **Bob Vila also recommend** shutting off your gas supply if you have **gas appliances** in your home. Find your home's gas valve and shut off the main gas line to shut off all appliances. If you can't access your gas line safely, it's best to call in an expert to do so for you.

Call in an expert ASAP



Credit: Getty Images / fstop123

To know the actual extent of your water damage, you'll need to have a plumbing expert come as soon as possible.

When you're dealing with a flooded home, you'll need an emergency plumbing service to assist in evaluating the plumbing damage done in your home. It's best to call a service immediately to minimize the damage done, especially if your community is experiencing widespread damage and service is in high demand.

Wilkinson says, "Water can damage a house very fast, and it doesn't take a lot to make a lot of damage."

Crow also recommends immediately contacting a clean-up and restoration service.

Water damage restoration services can help evaluate and fix the damage caused by prolonged water exposure.

To find a reputable service, the **National Center for Healthy Housing** recommends researching options on restoration industry websites like **The Restoration Industry Association**.

It's also important to know that if your home is not dried out within 22-48, **the EPA says** you should assume there is mold growth happening in your home.

At this point, cleaning up may become dangerous to do on your own, as mold exposure can lead to irritation, allergic reactions, and even infection in people with weakened immune systems. In this case, consult a qualified professional to inspect and restore the damage in your home.

Wear proper protective gear if you have it

It's important to keep yourself protected while cleaning, especially if there's a chance that you may be exposed to mold or mildew.

The EPA recommends donning protective gear before cleaning up your home. If you have **safety goggles** and any sort of **heavy-duty rubber gloves**, go ahead and put those on. Wear work boots if you have them.

If you can get access to **an N95 respirator**—which can commonly be found at hardware stores again—wear that as well to avoid inhaling contaminants that breed in standing water.

If your home is flooding to the point where you believe you or others could be in danger, **evacuate**.

- **Get the Gateway Safety Protective Glasses at Amazon for \$7.18**
- **Get the Wells Lamont Heavy Duty Work Gloves at Amazon for \$10.15**
- **Get the 3M N95 Disposable Multi-Purpose Respiratory Mask (Pack of 25) at The Home Depot for \$41.97**

Begin clearing out standing water



You don't need any specific equipment or tools to clean—using a regular mop can really help to collect standing water around the home.

First, focus on getting as much standing water out of the house as possible. Try to get the house as clean and dry as possible before the 22-48 hour period that can cause mold and mildew growth is up.

If the water is only in a portion of your home, your goal is to keep it from spreading to other rooms, especially if you have wood floors and you're worried about water getting underneath the flooring, says Crow.

If you have power, use a **wet-dry vacuum** (otherwise known as a shop vac) like the **Vacmaster Shop Vacuum** to extract the water **from floors, carpets, and hard surfaces**. If your home has a **sump pump**, this will automatically help push water and moisture out of your home.

If your power is out, you'll still want to try to remove the water quickly, so it's time to get a little creative with your clean-up method.

Crow says, "Use anything that'll absorb water—all the towels you have, comforters off your bed, anything like that."

Crow also recommends **using a mop** to soak up as much water as possible. If you're able to get to a hardware store, you can pick up a **squeegee** to physically push the water out towards your garage or porch.

- **Get the Vacmaster VBV1210 Wet/Dry Shop Vacuum at Amazon for \$105.40**
- **Get the Superior Pump Utility Pump at Amazon for \$56.87**
- **Get the Yocada Looped-End Wet Mop at Amazon for \$22.88**
- **Get the Blue Hawk Squeegee at Lowe's for \$8.98**

Try to dry out what's most susceptible to water damage

As we've mentioned, water damage happens fast. For this reason, Crow and Wilkinson recommend determining the areas of your home that you believe need to be protected from water damage.

"Anything with a porous surface is going to soak water up—this includes sheetrock, baseboard, and wood," says Wilkinson. Focus your water-cleaning efforts on materials like this first. If you can save some or most of your flooring or walls from encroaching water, that is a best-case scenario.

For materials like sheetrock, also known as drywall, if the water damage isn't significant, restoration service **Restoration Local recommends** using a wet-dry vacuum. It could potentially cause some damage on the walls, but it's better than having to completely replace your drywall. You can also use large towels to blot the walls and collect moisture.

If significant water damage from heavy flooding occurs, your drywall most likely won't make it. At this point, experts recommend punching out holes to allow water and moisture to escape since the damaged drywall will need to be replaced regardless.

Throw away what can't be dried

After removing as much water as possible from the home, begin to evaluate the damage done to your furniture and personal items. Creating two piles—one for salvageable items and another for stuff you just need to toss.

Paper products, food, and electronics that are water-damaged will most likely need to be thrown away. Upholstered furniture and rugs may be able to be restored or cleaned, but will require attention from an expert quickly.

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