

FLOOD RECOVERY ADVICE – DRYING

This Advice Sheet provides detailed information that needs to be considered by anyone whose building has sustained flood damage. It aims to assist in making decisions for the future in relation to repairing, rebuilding or relocating – particularly in view of the increased frequency of flood events.

DRYING OUT THE BUILDING

- Once all the wet materials have been removed and the building has been thoroughly cleaned, drying out can begin. Be warned that the drying out, particularly in damp conditions, can take several months.
- Quick drying is preferable. The removal of linings will speed the drying of concealed places so that internal linings can be readily replaced when the building is dry. Re-lining should not be carried out until the moisture content in the timber wall framing has dropped to 12-15% and the framing must show no signs of rot.
- On dry days, keep all windows and doors open to maximise ventilation and therefore drying. They may have swollen as a result of the water and be difficult to open. On wet days, leave the windows ajar so there is still some ventilation. Leaving cupboard doors and drawers open will speed the drying of these items.
- Heaters, fans and dehumidifiers can be used to dry out moisture, however due care must be taken to not use too much heat because it will cause wood to warp and split. An inside air temperature of approximately 20 °C (or at least 8 °C above the outside air temperature) will increase the drying rate without creating additional problems. It is essential to use some ventilation as well as heating to remove the warm moist air from the building.
- Do not light a fire within a brick fireplace to help with the drying unless it has already dried fully... if there is still moisture present, steam will be created which may blow the mortar and bricks apart.

- Particleboard floors, if under water for less than a week, **may** be serviceable. The floor must be dry before its strength can be checked.
- Drying of the floor can be helped by:
 - sanding or using a heat gun to remove any varnish or sealer
 - making sure there is good ventilation both inside the house and under the floor
 - lifting water-resistant floor coverings like vinyl sheet, vinyl tiles and ceramic tiles.

Do not attempt to straighten warped or buckled timber floors until the building has dried completely and the moisture content of the timbers is 16% or less.

MOISTURE TESTING

- Before any wall linings are replaced there should be a pre-lining inspection to verify that the substrate has dried sufficiently. The person doing this inspection should have a moisture meter to ascertain if the framing moisture level has dropped to a suitable level. While the Building Code requires a moisture content of less than 20%, it must be noted that plasterboard manufacturers will usually require a level of 12-16% for normal use and 8-10% if air conditioning or central heating is to be used.
- For concrete floors, the most reliable test for dryness is a flooring hygrometer. If one is not available, the following method will give a general indication of the moisture level:
 - Tape all four edges of a 1m x 1m piece clear polyethylene sheet to the floor in an area away from direct sunlight.
 - Cover with a blanket and leave for 24 hours.

- If condensation forms on the underside of the polyethylene the floor is too damp for laying vinyl or carpet with rubber underlay or backing.
- Lift the polyethylene, and if the floor is too wet place another piece in a few days (do not leave the piece attached to the floor).
- Wait until polyethylene taped in place stays dry for two to three days before laying the floor covering.

If you would like to talk to an Archicentre Australia architect – a property assessment and design expert – about a particular matter, please call Archicentre Australia on **1300 13 45 13 or go to www.archicentreaustralia.com.au**