



Architects Advisory Service

Flood Recovery Advice – Repairs

This Fact Sheet is intended to provide detailed information that needs to be considered by anyone whose home has sustained flood damage. Our hope is that it will help people to make decisions for the future in relation to repairing, rebuilding or relocating their home.

Please note: No decisions should be made regarding the repair of the building until independent, written advice has been provided by a registered structural engineer. A structural engineer is the only person qualified to provide you with this advice.

- Where applicable, repair work must be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Building Code of Australia, local authority requirements and manufacturers specifications to ensure legal compliance and maximum serviceability of the building into the future.
- If the remedial work involves 'like for like' replacement, there may not be a requirement for statutory approvals but the local authority should still be consulted.

General

- While owners want to get their house back to what it was before the flood as soon as possible, it is essential that the house is sufficiently dry before any repair work is carried out.

- Undertaking repairs to the structure and finishes before the house is dry enough can result in:
 - mould developing
 - poor adhesion (blistering) of finishes
 - materials continuing to move as they finish drying resulting in cosmetic cracking to plaster and paintwork
 - lifting and bubbling of vinyl floor coverings
 - health problems for occupants
- Timber in houses normally has an in-service moisture content of between 12% and 20%. After standing in water, timber will absorb moisture and may take months for the moisture content to return to what it was. It must drop to 12-16% before wall linings are replaced.
- Damaged sarking or building paper in external walls may need to be replaced. This will require the cladding to be removed on the outside of the house where the damage occurs. It is not sufficient to staple new sarking to the studs on the inside.
- When reinstating wall or ceiling insulation, take the opportunity to upgrade to the best practice for the area.
- Any framing reinstatement work must be carried out in accordance with the Building Code, including bracing and/or any tie-down metalwork as required. Seek advice from the local Council if in doubt.

- Replace doors (including cupboard doors) which have been damaged as a result of swelling and/or blistering or peeling surfaces. In some instances, existing jamb linings may be retained, but it will often be more viable to install new pre-hung doors complete with new hardware.
- Check particleboard floors for swelling at the joints by using a long straight edge. If swelling is more than 4 mm the floor should be sanded flat. If it exceeds 6-8 mm, replace the floor.
- Once the house has been cleaned, certified sound and the building fabric dried the following items can, after cleaning and/or repair or replacement, be reinstalled:
 - appliances
 - hot water cylinders
 - heaters
 - central vacuum and heating systems
 - toilet cisterns
 - tapware
 - electrical fittings
 - carpet which does not have rubber backing or rubber underlay (rubber underlay will restrict the final drying).
- No decorating should be carried out until the moisture levels have dropped to the acceptable for relining.
- Under the floor, insulation which has been removed should be replaced. Under most floors perforated foil can be fixed directly to the underside of the floor joists, but adding timber battens will help prevent fixings pulling through. The use of purpose made polystyrene panels or glass fibre insulation fitted between the joists is an alternative, but they must be a tight fit between the floor joists.
- Ventilation holes in foundation walls should be made vermin proof if they have been damaged or removed to assist drying. Any base boards which have been removed should be replaced when the drying is complete.

- Fires should not be lit in brick fireplaces until they have fully dried. If there is still moisture present, steam will be created which can blow the mortar and bricks apart.

Scope of Works

- As with any building work it is important to accurately describe the scope of work to be done prior to seeking or accepting any quotations. Thorough and detailed scope of works documents (usually in the form of some drawings and specifications) will help to ensure that the end-price is the same as the start-price and that work proceeds without delay.

Registration

- Builders and trades-people require registration by the state consumer protection authority for many types of building work. It is important to verify that a contractor is registered with the appropriate authority where required before accepting their price to undertake any work. This will provide you with some recourse in the event of any failure to perform the work properly.

Insurance

- Larger scale building work (work valued above \$12,000 in Victoria, for example) may require the contractor to take out a home warranty insurance policy. It is important to verify that a contractor has taken out the appropriate policy where required.

Owner-Building

- Where an owner wishes to undertake building work it may be necessary for them to register themselves as an Owner-Builder with the appropriate authority. This carries with it significant legal liability and should be understood before any decisions are made.

Permits & Approvals

- Building Permits/Construction Certificates are required for any structural building work and Planning Permits/Development Approvals may also have to be obtained, particularly in areas prone to flooding or with heritage significance. Enquiries should be made of the local Council to determine whether and which permits or approvals may be necessary prior to the commencement of any work.

Quoting & Contracting

- Wherever possible, three quotations should be obtained for any building or repair work to ensure a fair price. In the event that three quotes are unavailable, independent construction cost estimates can help to establish whether a quote is fair and reasonable (refer the Archicentre Cost Guide for a range of common repair cost rates, for example).
- Quotations should be carefully reviewed to ensure that allowance has been made for all necessary work including materials, equipment hire, clean-up, tip fees and GST. Start and finish dates should also be made clear.
- A written agreement should be in place between any contracting parties that clearly sets out what work is to be done, by whom, when and for how much. Deposit payments should not generally exceed 10% of the contract value.

Quality Control

- Workmanship quality is important to verify, particularly in an environment where a high volume of work is being done as quickly as possible. It is important to maintain regular inspections of work in progress to ensure that it is being done in accordance with Australian Standards and/or best trade practice. If in doubt, seek independent advice before work progresses.

Archicentre Australia extends its deepest sympathies to all those affected by the floods and hopes that this information is helpful.

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