



# extension extra

South Dakota State University • U.S. Department of Agriculture

## After a Flood . . .

# Restoring Wood Furniture and Cabinets

Remove drawers and doors from wood furniture and cabinets as soon as possible after the water damage. If drawers and doors are stuck tight, take off the back and try pushing them out. Sometimes the board that backs a dresser or similar piece of furniture is thin and may warp. This may need to be replaced. Save the original for a pattern.

Next, hose or wash off loose soil. If necessary, use a brush and sudsy water to remove soil. Rinse away suds with clear water and dry with a cloth.

Let furniture and cabinets dry slowly out of direct sunlight. Slow drying will help reduce warping and splitting. Depending on how long the furniture was soaked by flood waters and the age and condition of the pieces, it may take from several weeks to several months for the piece to dry completely. Provide plenty of ventilation. Use fans, heaters, or dehumidifiers to keep the moist air moving and lower the humidity. Allow at least twice as much time for total drying as it takes for all visible signs of moisture to disappear. This will allow for internal drying.

After the furniture has dried completely, it may be possible to clean it without having to refinish it. To clean, go over the surface with mineral spirits, synthetic turpentine, or a cleanser-conditioner. Use a commercial cleaner or make your own. Always test first on a spot that doesn't show (apply, wipe, and let dry) to be sure the product makes the finish look better, not worse.

### Cleanser/Conditioner Recipe

Mix in glass jar with tight lid:

3 parts (3/4 cup) boiled linseed oil. (Buy boiled oil. Do not boil at home.)

1 part (1/4 cup gum turpentine (not synthetic)

To use:

Protect work area. Open windows or work outside. Do not smoke. Pour a little hot water in a dish or can placed on a saucer. Shake cleanser/conditioner and pour carefully into hot water to cover surface. **DO NOT STIR.** Dip cloth into oily surface floating on top of water and rub small area of furniture surface at

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a time. Use toothbrush on carved areas and grooves. For areas that appear to have a buildup of dirt, dip a fine steel wool pad into cleaner and rub lightly with the grain of the wood. Dip a fresh cloth into clear, warm water. Wring cloth and wipe surface. Finish by wiping surface with a clean, dry cloth.

**Important:** Discard mixture when the water becomes cold. **DO NOT REHEAT.** It is flammable. You can store the unused mixture indefinitely in the tightly closed container. Shake well before using. After cleaning, if finish looks acceptable, apply furniture polish, oil, or wax. If not, furniture may have to be refinished.

### **Cloudy Spots on Furniture and Woodwork**

White spots and a cloudy film on wooden furniture may develop from dampness even though the pieces are not in water. If the entire surface is cloudy, rub with a cloth dipped in turpentine, camphorated oil, or mayonnaise. Wipe dry at once. If this doesn't work, dip a fine steel wool pad in oil—linseed, olive, mineral, or lemon—and rub gently with the wood grain. For very deep spots, use a drop or two of ammonia

on a damp cloth; wipe dry at once. Cigarette ashes or salt rubbed in with the fingertip or a cork may remove spots. After spots are removed, apply polish, wax, or oil. In some cases it may be impossible to remove spots without refinishing.

### **Mildew on Furniture and Woodwork**

Thoroughly clean mildewed furniture, woodwork, and other wooden parts of structures by scrubbing them with a mild alkali, such as washing soda or an all-purpose cleaner containing trisodium phosphate (4 to 6 tablespoons to a gallon of water) or with a household cleaner that states that it sanitizes or destroys bacteria. Paint and grocery stores and janitorial supply houses sell these products under various trade names.

Rinse well with clear water and allow the wood to dry thoroughly. If the mold has grown into the wood under paint or varnish, it may be necessary to scrub the wood first with an abrasive cleaner. Then wash with a solution containing one cup of household laundry chlorine bleach to a gallon of water. Finally, rinse the wood well with clear water and dry thoroughly. If reapplying paint, choose one that is mildew resistant.