

# Hurricane Restoration:



## Be Ready For Anything

By John Braun

Late last year, we were called to D'Iberville, Miss., located on the Gulf Coast a few miles from Biloxi, for a water-restoration project. The job was a home that had been flooded by three feet of storm surge from Hurricane Katrina. My company has worked water-restoration jobs following four major hurricanes; we consider ourselves hurricane veterans.

Arriving on scene, we saw the double front doors of a beautiful 3,000-square-foot home had been pushed open by the surge. Glancing inside the living room, I saw a pile of rubble that consisted of pine straw, seaweed, logs, insulation, and furniture. As we walked through the front door a snake crawled into the front bedroom. Right then I wished I had bought those extra-high rubber boots. One of my techs turned to me with a frightened look and said, "I know you said to be ready for anything, but I wasn't ready for that."

Those of us who live in hurricane-

prone areas know that every time a storm threatens, we must prepare for the worst. If we do not, our ability to do business is hindered.

What should you be prepared for if you perform restoration services after a major hurricane? Prepare to live in a third world country. There is no gas, electricity, or running water. There are no open restaurants, hotels, or stores. Your cell phone may or may not work. As hurricane restoration veteran Joe Cannon of Carpet Care Services in Summerville, S.C. says, "Come self-contained and come with a crew of at least three or four people. Don't come alone."

What kind of equipment should you bring? To start, bring enough of the right equipment to make your trip financially rewarding. Desiccant dehumidifiers, especially diesel-powered, may be the best choice. Low-grain dehumidifiers work well when there is no air conditioning. Axial or low-amp fans will allow you to con-

nect more fans to a generator. Remember, there may not be electricity for days, if not weeks, so don't forget to bring generators or your equipment may be useless.

Extra items that you likely will need include:

- Fresh water and several days supply of food
- Personal protective gear: gloves, knee high boots, Tyvek suits, and respirators
- Chainsaw, pressure washer, and wet vacuum
- Generators, gasoline, and extension cords
- Wheelbarrows, thick trash bags, push broom, and snow shovel
- Thick plastic sheeting, staple gun, duct tape, and razor knives with extra blades
- Snakebite kit

Anti-microbial agents will be needed for the rising floodwater jobs. Moisture meters will be necessary. An



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infrared camera will be much quicker than standard moisture meters, as there will be moisture throughout the building where you are working. Bring your truckmount if you have room, but you may not use it often. Mostly, your job will involve tearing out carpet and building materials.

So what is it like onsite? “The work is actually overwhelming,” said Harry Arnold of Harry’s Carpet and Flooring in Kenner, La. “Preparation should be manpower and a lot of tools for tear out. Drying really isn’t an issue with people as much as mold growth. It grows very fast.”

Keep in mind that your accommodations will consist of camping out unless you know someone in the area. In 2004, after Hurricane Ivan hit Pensacola, Fla., many restoration companies came from other cities to help. Tony Romeo, the owner of Cleaning Supply Network, was kind enough to open his home and yard for several dozen restoration technicians to set up base camp.

You will want to brush up on your structural drying education. Review your copy of the IICRC S500 and refresh yourself on psychrometry. Considering that you may be running equipment on generators, you may be able to remove more grains per pound with an open drying system than with low-grain dehumidifiers. Break out your hygrometer and psychrometric calculator to see what will remove the most grains of moisture. You may also want to review category three restoration procedures, as most will be “black water” situations and your health may be in danger.

Getting someone to actually hire you for restoration work once you arrive in a hurricane-ravaged area can occasionally be tricky. With good reason, many locals are resistant to hiring someone from out of town. Historically, tree workers are the first to go knocking door-to-door with prices that are sometimes triple what they would be had a hurricane not occurred. Your best bet is to get in



touch with a local cleaning company and work out a deal to get referrals. The local cleaning companies cannot handle all of the work they receive and may need your help. However, they get bombarded with calls from companies trying to get water damage referrals. Be sympathetic. Respect their time. Keep in mind that this is a very stressful time for anyone that lives in the area.

Restoration work may be obtained through direct selling at large commercial buildings. Commercial building managers are inclined to spend money on restoration so that business is not disrupted. Make sure you show them proof of insurance and pictures of recent restoration work you have completed. It will be beneficial to have testimonials and corresponding phone numbers (remember, they may be skeptical of hiring you.).

Sell your restoration services by telling people the benefits of what you are doing. Your client does not care about your desiccant dehumidifier. He cares about what it can do for him. Let him know that you will be minimizing the growth of mold and making his building healthier so that he can get back in his building faster. Be very upfront and tell him that he may still need mold remediation performed at a later time, but the work that you do will minimize the need for it. Put everything you tell him in writing. Your client is in a stressful situation and may forget everything you tell him.

That said, keep very good notes and get the client to sign everything. Several clients will have homeowner’s insurance, but will later discover that they do not have flood insurance.

Without flood insurance, your client may not be reimbursed for your services. This will cause your client to find any way possible to avoid paying your bill. Your client may then not remember exactly how much you said you would charge. It is wise to give a price list of what you are going to charge before you begin the job.



Joe Cannon spent 18 days in Mississippi performing commercial restoration work just four days after Katrina hit. He said, “On the twelfth day, one of the biggest thrills we found was a working washer and dryer. We hadn’t washed any clothes in twelve days.” Something as simple as a washing machine is a luxury. Don’t depend on being able to purchase items you need. Bring everything you might need with you. If you plan properly, you can make plenty of money after a disaster. Be ethical and honest about your prices.

When the job is over, you will feel good about helping people and be happy with the money you’ve made. Just remember, if you are going to enter the hurricane twilight zone, prepare properly before you go and, when you get there, be ready for anything. **ICS**

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