FloodResponsePros

2026 EDITION



THE HOMEOWNER'S FIELD GUIDE

Water damage: find it, stop it, dry it

Where the water is coming from, how serious it is, and what to do in the first hour.

Burst or frozen pipe | Ceiling leak | Basement flooding | Appliance leak | Water heater leak | Sewage backup

CALL A LOCAL PRO

(844) 990-0433

floodresponsepros.com

WELCOME

Keep this guide where you can find it fast

Problems at home rarely wait for a good moment. This guide helps you recognize what's going on, decide how fast to act and know what to do in the first few minutes.

1. **Start with the sign.** The "Identify it by what you see" page matches what you see to the likely problem.
2. **Check the urgency.** Every problem carries a color: ● Call today, ● Call this week, ● Not urgent.
3. **Do the first steps.** Each problem lists what to do right now, while you call.

⚠ **Safety first.** General guidance only. If there's flooding near electrical panels, a gas smell or structural danger, leave and call 911.

ONE CALL CONNECTS YOU WITH AN INDEPENDENT LOCAL COMPANY

(844) 990-0433

INSIDE

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AT A GLANCE

How urgent is it?

A quick way to sort the problem in front of you.

Call today

- Burst or frozen pipe
- Ceiling leak
- Basement flooding
- Water heater leak
- Sewage backup
- Storm or flood water

Call this week

- Appliance leak
- Hidden leak

TALK TO A LOCAL PRO

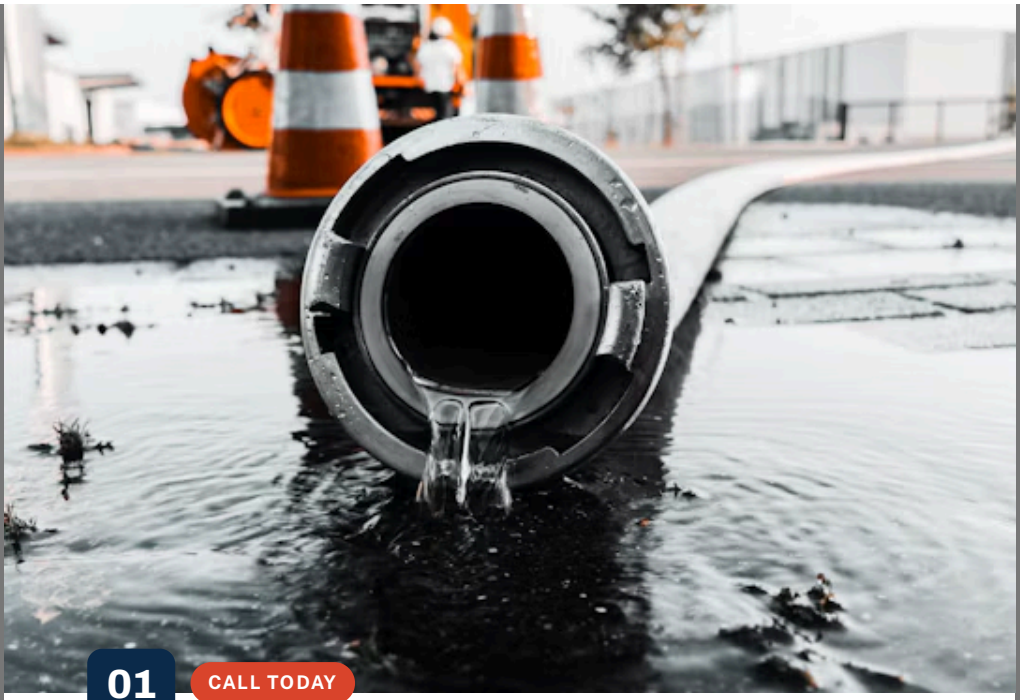
(844) 990-0433

START HERE

Identify it by what you see

Most water damage shows a sign before the source is obvious. Find yours, then jump to that source.

WHAT YOU NOTICE	MOST LIKELY	PAGE
Water spraying from a pipe	**Burst pipe**	6
Brown ring on the ceiling	**Ceiling leak**	8
Water on the basement floor	**Basement flooding**	10
Puddle around the washer or dishwasher	**Appliance leak**	12
Rust-colored water at the water heater	**Water heater leak**	14
Sewage smell and dirty water in the tub	**Sewage backup**	16
Water coming in after a storm	**Storm or flood water**	18
Musty smell, no visible leak	**Hidden leak**	20



01 CALL TODAY

SOURCE 1 OF 8

Burst or frozen pipe

WATER TYPE	MOVES FAST
Clean supply water at first	Several gallons a minute

How to recognize it

Water spraying or pouring from a pipe, a sudden drop in water pressure, or a ceiling that starts dripping after a hard freeze.

Prevent it next time

- Insulate pipes in garages, crawl spaces and outside walls.
- Let faucets drip on the coldest nights.
- Know where the main shut-off valve is.

Why it matters

A broken supply line keeps running until the water is shut off, soaking floors, walls and the ceiling below.

Signs to look for

- Water spraying or pouring from a pipe
- A sudden hiss or rushing-water sound
- Frost on a pipe, then a leak as it thaws
- Water pressure suddenly drops

Do this now

1. Shut off the main water valve.
2. Turn off power to wet rooms at the breaker, from a dry spot.
3. Move valuables and photograph everything.

What the pro will do

1. Extracts standing water with truck-mounted or portable pumps.
2. Measures moisture in walls, floors and ceilings.
3. Sets up air movers and dehumidifiers, then checks daily.

> Call today. Drying in the first 24 to 48 hours is what keeps mold away.

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02 CALL TODAY

SOURCE 2 OF 8

Ceiling leak

USUAL SOURCES
Bathroom above, roof, AC line

WARNING SIGN
A sagging, bulging patch

How to recognize it

Brown rings, bubbling paint or a drip from a light fixture. A bulge means water is pooling above the drywall.

Prevent it next time

- Recaulk tubs and showers on the floor above.
- Keep AC drain lines clear in summer.
- Check the attic after heavy storms.

Why it matters

Wet drywall can give way without warning, and insulation above stays wet long after the drip stops.

Signs to look for

- Brown or yellow water rings
- Bubbling or peeling paint
- Drips from a light or vent
- A soft, sagging patch

Do this now

1. Put a bucket under the drip and move furniture.
2. Stay out from under any sag.
3. Turn off the light circuit if water is near a fixture.

What the pro will do

1. Finds where the water is coming from.
2. Opens or removes wet ceiling drywall safely.
3. Dries the space above before repairs begin.

> Call today, sooner if the ceiling is sagging.

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03 CALL TODAY

SOURCE 3 OF 8

Basement flooding

COMMON CAUSES
Heavy rain, sump pump, burst pipe

WATCH FOR
Water near outlets or the panel

How to recognize it

Standing water on the floor, wet carpet or a waterline on the walls. Often follows heavy rain or a sump pump that stopped.

Prevent it next time

- Test the sump pump each spring and fall.
- Keep downspouts draining away from the house.
- Store boxes on shelves, not the floor.

Why it matters

Basements dry slowly. Water wicks into drywall, framing and stored boxes within hours.

Signs to look for

- Standing water on the floor
- Sump pump not running
- Wet carpet or a waterline on walls
- A damp, musty smell

Do this now

1. Stay out if water is near outlets or the electrical panel.
2. Note how high the water reached.
3. Move what you safely can upstairs.

What the pro will do

1. Pumps out water once power is safe.
2. Removes soaked carpet, pad and drywall.
3. Dries the space with dehumidifiers and monitors it.

> Call today. Water extraction and drying should start as soon as it's safe.

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04 CALL THIS WEEK

SOURCE 4 OF 8

Appliance leak

USUAL CULPRITS
Washer, dishwasher, fridge, ice maker

OFTEN HIDDEN
Under floors and cabinets

How to recognize it

A puddle near the appliance, warped flooring or a swollen cabinet base. Supply hoses and drain lines are the common failure points.

Prevent it next time

- Replace rubber washer hoses with braided ones.
- Check under the dishwasher and fridge yearly.
- Don't run the washer or dishwasher while you're away.

Why it matters

Slow leaks soak the subfloor long before you see water, especially under laminate and vinyl.

Signs to look for

- Puddle beside or under the appliance
- Floor boards lifting or cupping
- Swollen cabinet base
- Damp smell when the cabinet opens

Do this now

1. Turn off the appliance and its water valve.
2. Pull it out only if safe, and dry the area.
3. Photograph the floor and hose.

What the pro will do

1. Checks under flooring and cabinets with moisture meters.
2. Removes swollen materials that can't be dried.
3. Dries the subfloor so mold can't take hold.

> Call this week, today if the floor is soft or water spread to other rooms.

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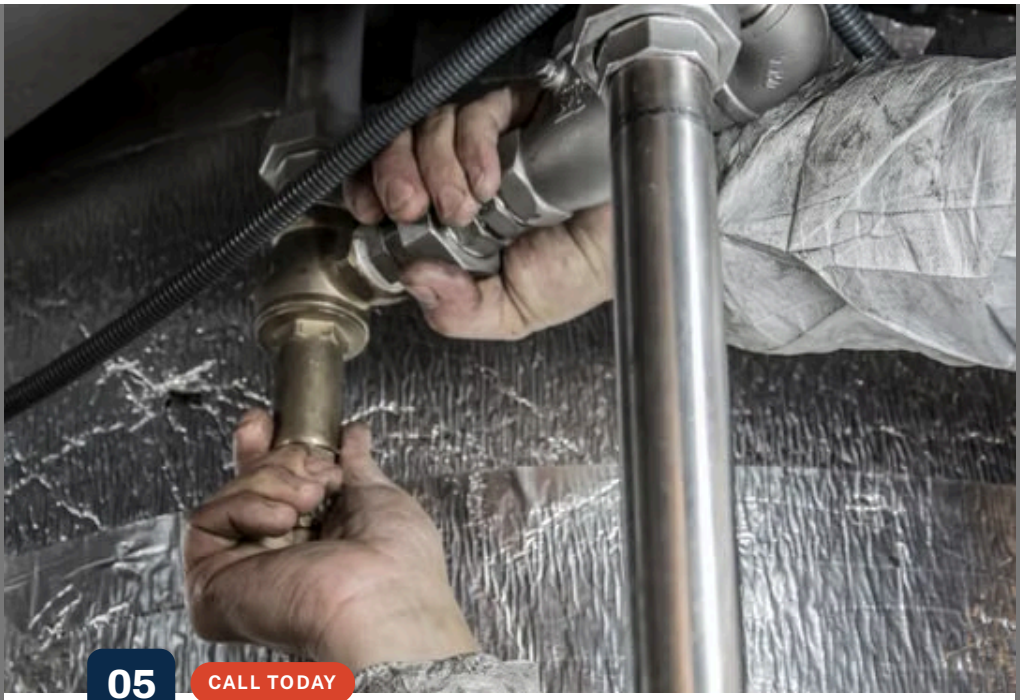

05 CALL TODAY

SOURCE 5 OF 8

Water heater leak

HOLDS	BAD SIGN
40 to 80 gallons	Water from the tank itself

How to recognize it

Water pooling at the base, rust-colored water, or drips from the valves or fittings above the tank.

Prevent it next time

- Flush the tank once a year.
- Put a drain pan under tanks on finished floors.
- Note the install year on the label.

Why it matters

A leaking tank can let go all at once and flood the room.

Signs to look for

- Puddle at the base of the tank
- Rust-colored water
- Dripping from the relief valve
- Rumbling or popping sounds

Do this now

1. Turn off the cold-water supply to the tank.
2. Turn off the power or set gas to off.
3. Keep kids and pets away from hot water.

What the pro will do

1. Removes the water and dries the room.
2. Checks walls and floors near the tank.
3. Works alongside your plumber's repair or replacement.

Call today. A tank leak usually gets worse, not better.

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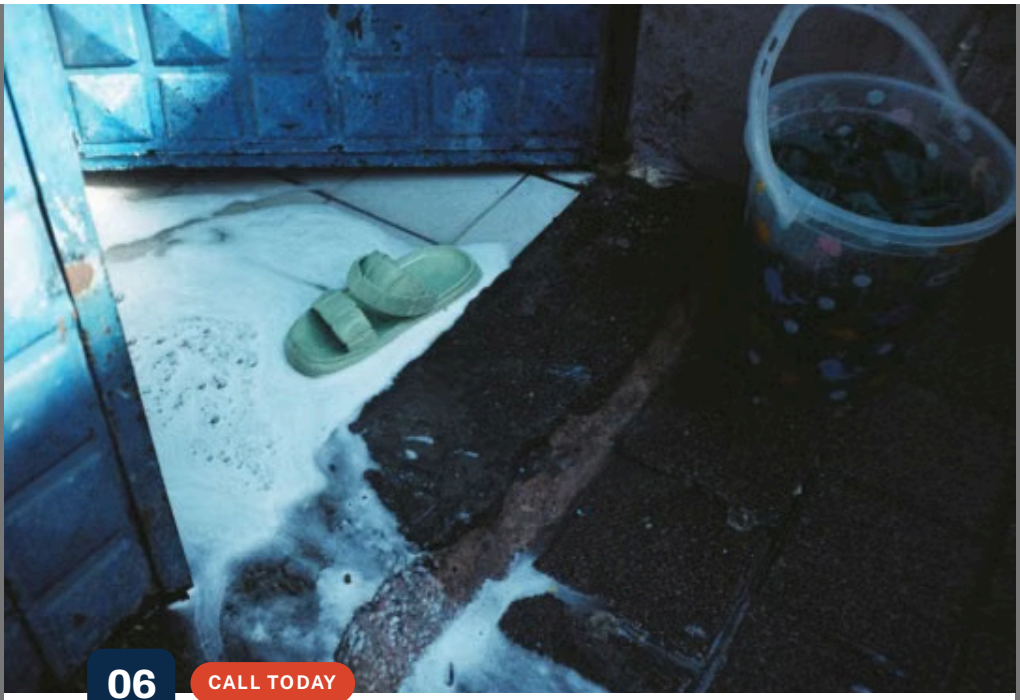

06 CALL TODAY

SOURCE 6 OF 8

Sewage backup

WATER TYPE	HEALTH RISK
Category 3, contaminated	**Bacteria and viruses**

How to recognize it

Dirty water coming up from floor drains, tubs or toilets, with a sewage smell. Often several drains at once.

Prevent it next time

- Flush only toilet paper.
- Keep grease out of every drain.
- Ask about a backwater valve if your area floods.

Why it matters

Sewage water is contaminated. Soaked materials usually need to come out, not just be dried.

Signs to look for

- Dirty water rising from a floor drain
- Toilets and tubs backing up together
- Gurgling drains
- Strong sewage smell

Do this now

1. Stop using water and drains in the house.
2. Keep kids and pets out of the area.
3. Don't touch the water without gloves and boots.

What the pro will do

1. Wears protective gear for contaminated water.
2. Removes soaked porous materials.
3. Cleans and disinfects everything left behind.

Call today. Sewage cleanup needs protective gear and disinfection.

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07 CALL TODAY

SOURCE 7 OF 8

Storm or flood water

WATER TYPE	ALSO CHECK
Usually contaminated	**Roof, siding and openings**

How to recognize it

Water coming in under doors, through basement walls or from the roof during or after heavy rain.

Prevent it next time

- Clear yard drains and downspouts before storm season.
- Keep important papers up high or in waterproof bins.
- Know how to turn off power to the basement.

Why it matters

Floodwater carries mud and contaminants, and wet walls hold moisture well after the water leaves.

Signs to look for

- Water under exterior doors
- Mud lines on walls
- Wet carpet near outside walls
- Leaks during heavy rain

Do this now

1. Follow local emergency instructions first.
2. Stay out of water that touches outlets.
3. Photograph damage before cleanup.

What the pro will do

1. Removes mud and water once it's safe to enter.
2. Takes out materials floodwater soaked.
3. Dries, cleans and disinfects the structure.

> Call today once it's safe to go back in.

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(844) 990-0433



08 CALL THIS WEEK

SOURCE 8 OF 8

Hidden leak

CLUE	OFTEN BEHIND
Musty smell, no visible water	**Walls, floors, cabinets**

How to recognize it

A musty smell, warm or soft spots on the floor, stains that slowly grow, or a water bill that jumps.

Prevent it next time

- Check your water meter with every tap off now and then.
- Watch for paint bubbles and swollen baseboards.
- Look under sinks every month.

Why it matters

Slow leaks feed mold quietly inside walls and under floors.

Signs to look for

- Musty smell with no clear source
- Paint bubbling or baseboards swelling
- Running-water sound with fixtures off
- Water meter moving when nothing's on

Do this now

1. Turn off every fixture and check the water meter.
2. Photograph stains and mark their edges.
3. Avoid opening walls yourself.

What the pro will do

1. Uses moisture meters and thermal cameras.
2. Opens only what's needed to reach the water.
3. Dries the cavity and checks for mold.

> Call this week. Moisture meters and thermal cameras find what eyes can't.

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SIDE BY SIDE

Tell water types apart

Knowing which water you have tells you how careful to be and what can be dried.

Clean, gray or black water?

	Clean water	Gray or black water
COMES FROM	Supply pipes, faucets, ice makers	Washers, toilets, sewage, floodwater
SMELL	None	Soapy, foul or sewage
CLEANUP	Dry most materials in place	Remove soaked materials and disinfect
CHANGES WITH TIME	Can turn gray after 48 hours	Always treat as contaminated

Roof leak or plumbing leak?

	Roof leak	Plumbing leak
WHEN	Only during or after rain	Any time, rain or shine
WHERE	Upper floor, near roof vents	Under bathrooms, kitchens, pipes
PATTERN	Stops in dry weather	Steady or gets worse
CHECK	Attic for wet insulation	Water meter with taps off

Still not sure? Describe what you see on the phone and a local pro can tell you which it is.

HOW TO

Before you call

Photograph everything

Take photos and video before moving anything. Useful for the crew and your records.

Make it safe

Turn off power to wet areas at the breaker, from a dry spot. Never step into water near outlets.

Stop the water

Shut the main valve. Know where it is before you need it.

Watch the clock

The EPA says wet materials should be dried within 24 to 48 hours to prevent mold.

Move what matters

Lift rugs, electronics and papers off wet floors.

Let air move

Open interior doors and run fans only if the water is clean and power is safe.

FILL THIS IN TODAY

My home at a glance

Five minutes now spares you a scramble later. Keep this page with the guide.

Main water shut-off valve is located:

Electrical panel is located:

Sump pump: location and last tested:

Water heater: location and year installed:

Gas shut-off valve is located:

Policy number for your home:

Notes:

THROUGH THE YEAR

Water safety through the year

A few minutes each season heads off the most common problems.

Winter

- Insulate pipes in unheated spaces.
- Let faucets drip on the coldest nights.
- Keep the heat on when you travel.
- Know your main shut-off.

Spring

- Test the sump pump.
- Clear yard drains and downspouts.
- Look in the attic after heavy rain.
- Check under sinks for drips.

Summer

- Clear AC drain lines.
- Check washer hoses for bulges.
- Plan for storm season.
- Watch ceilings under bathrooms.

Fall

- Drain and disconnect garden hoses.
- Flush the water heater.
- Clean out leaves before storms.
- Insulate exposed pipes.

QUESTIONS

Water damage questions

How do I know where water damage is coming from?

Start with timing. If it only appears during rain, think roof or storm. If it's constant, think plumbing. Turn off every fixture and watch the water meter: if it still moves, there's a plumbing leak.

How fast does mold grow after water damage?

Mold can start growing within 24 to 48 hours on damp materials, which is why fast drying matters so much.

Is ceiling water damage an emergency?

If the ceiling is sagging or dripping near a light, yes. Stay out from under it and call today.

Can I dry water damage with fans myself?

Fans help with small, clean spills. Water that soaked into walls, carpet pad or subfloors usually needs professional drying equipment and moisture readings.

What are clean, gray and black water?

Clean water comes from supply lines. Gray water has some contamination, like a washer drain. Black water is sewage or floodwater and is treated as hazardous.

Is it safe to stay home with water damage?

Usually, if the power is safe, the water is clean and nothing is sagging. Sewage, floodwater or electrical risk are reasons to stay out of those areas.

QUESTIONS

Water damage questions (continued)

How long does it take to dry a house after water damage?

Often three to five days with professional equipment, depending on how much got wet and what materials are involved.

What should I photograph after water damage?

The source, the water, every wet room, damaged belongings and any watermarks on walls, before cleanup begins.

Should I remove wet carpet myself?

Pull back rugs if it's safe, but leave wall-to-wall carpet and pad for the crew to assess, especially with gray or black water.

Why does my house smell musty after a leak?

A musty smell usually means moisture is still trapped somewhere, often under flooring or inside walls.

What does a water damage company do first?

They find and stop the source, measure moisture, remove standing water, then set up drying equipment and monitor it daily.

Can water damage be hidden behind walls?

Yes. Moisture meters and thermal cameras find water inside walls and under floors that you can't see.

CUT OUT AND KEEP

When something goes wrong

1. Stop the water: turn the main shut-off valve clockwise.
2. Make it safe: switch off power to wet areas from a dry spot.
3. Stay out of water near outlets or the electrical panel.
4. Sewage or floodwater? Keep kids and pets away.
5. Photograph everything before cleanup.
6. Call a water damage company. Drying in 24 to 48 hours matters.

KEEP THIS NUMBER IN YOUR PHONE

(844) 990-0433

Scan for the online guide

with the 60-second problem finder and more answers.

floodresponsepros.com/water-damage-guide/

KEEP HANDY

Important numbers

Fill these in now, so you're not searching when something goes wrong.

Emergency: 911

Gas utility emergency line

Water utility

Electric utility

Plumber

Neighbor with a spare key

Policy number for your home

YOUR LOCAL PRO LINE

(844) 990-0433

Notes

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

FloodResponsePros

FloodResponsePros connects homeowners with independent local water damage restoration companies for burst pipes, flooding, leaks, sewage backups and storm water.

How we're paid

FloodResponsePros is a referral service. Homeowners don't pay us. Independent local companies in our network pay us when we connect them with homeowners who call. We don't perform the work, and any work, timing and terms are agreed directly between you and the company.

Important

This guide is general information, not advice for your specific home. Every home is different. In an emergency, or if anyone is in danger, call 911 first. Before you hire anyone, confirm they hold the credentials required for the work in your area. Same-day service is subject to availability. Calls may be recorded for quality purposes.

Photos

Photographs are stock images from Pexels and Unsplash, used under each site's terms, to illustrate common problems. They don't show specific companies, jobs or customers. Any people shown are models.

Water damage: find it, stop it, dry it
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