

DAMAGE CONTROL
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

KNOW THE DAMAGE

What to look for on damages related to water, fire
or mold - and when to call a professional.

PART 1 OF 2

STRIKE PROPERTY CARE SOLUTIONS

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SERVING HOMES ACROSS THE SUNSHINE STATE

How to Use This Guide

This guide explains the most common types of property damage in plain language - what to look for, what to ask, and when to bring in a professional. Use it to understand what may be happening in your home and to make confident, informed decisions.

What's inside

- Water Damage - hidden moisture and what it ruins.
- Fire & Smoke - soot, odor, and time-sensitive damage.
- Mold - a moisture problem before a cleaning problem.
- Odor - why the smell keeps coming back.
- Safety - when to stop and call a professional.

How each topic is laid out

- How to identify it - the visible signs.
- What to ask first - the questions that matter.
- What you may need - the likely scope of work.
- A closer look - the science behind the problem.
- Did you know + common questions - quick facts.

A few things to keep in mind

- When in doubt, stop and call a professional - especially with electrical hazards, sewage, or anything structural.
- Don't disturb suspected mold, soot, or contaminated water; it can spread the problem or affect your health.
- Act quickly. With water and smoke, the first 24-48 hours often decide what can be saved.
- Take photos and note when the damage started - it helps any inspection and insurance claim.
- A professional inspection finds the real source, not just the visible symptom.

Water Damage

Water damage is rarely just what you can see. Moisture travels through wall cavities, under flooring, into insulation, and around HVAC components long after the surface looks and feels dry.

DAMAGE CONTROL
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

WATER DAMAGE

HOW TO SPOT IT

- ✓ Ceiling or wall stains
- ✓ Bubbling paint or swollen baseboards
- ✓ Warped floors or musty odor

ASK FIRST

- ❓ Where did the water come from?
- ❓ Is the source stopped?
- ❓ How long has it been wet?

HIDDEN MOISTURE | **MOLD RISK** | **AIR QUALITY**

DON'T GUESS. IDENTIFY THE SOURCE FIRST.
A proper inspection helps prevent bigger repairs.

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How clients identify it

- Ceiling or wall stains, or rings
- Bubbling paint or swollen baseboards
- Warped floors, wet carpet, or soft drywall
- A musty smell that won't clear

What to ask first

- Where did the water come from?
- Is the source shut off or stopped?
- How long has it been wet?
- Is the water clean, gray, or contaminated?

What they may need

- Water extraction and moisture mapping
- Structural drying and dehumidification
- Removal of unsalvageable wet materials
- Mold evaluation if moisture sat

The longer water sits, the more it costs - and the less can be saved.

Did you know?

24-48h

Mold can begin growing within a day or two of materials getting wet.

Hidden

Framing and insulation hold moisture meters detect long after surfaces feel dry.

It worsens

Clean water left standing can turn contaminated as time and temperature rise.

Don't guess. Identify the source first.

Water Damage - A Closer Look

Two things decide how a water loss is handled: how dirty the water is (its category) and how much water the structure is holding (its class). Knowing both is why a professional response looks nothing like wiping up a spill.

CATEGORY 1 - Clean water

From a sanitary source like a supply line or rain. Lowest health risk, but it degrades quickly and can spread far before it is found.

CATEGORY 2 - Gray water

Carries contamination that can cause illness - appliance overflows, washing-machine discharge, or a sump backup. Some porous materials may not be salvageable.

CATEGORY 3 - Black water

Grossly contaminated: sewage, rising flood water, or storm surge. Porous materials usually must be removed, and protective equipment is required.

CLASS 1 TO 4 - How wet is it

Class describes how much material is wet and how hard it is to dry, from a small area (Class 1) up to deeply saturated or specialty materials like hardwood and plaster (Class 4).

DIY vs. a trained technician

THE COMMON DIY APPROACH

- Towels and a box fan dry the surface only
- Stop when it "feels" dry to the hand
- No moisture readings and no record for the insurer

WHAT A TRAINED TECH DOES

- Measures moisture inside framing and subfloor
- Dries to a verified standard with the right equipment
- Documents readings, photos, and scope for the claim

Common questions homeowners ask

"It looks dry now - am I fine?"

Surfaces dry first; framing and insulation can stay wet for days. A moisture meter tells the truth the eye can't.

"Will insurance cover it?"

Often, if the loss is sudden and well documented. That's exactly why readings and photos from day one matter.

Fire & Smoke Damage

Fire damage extends far beyond burned material. Smoke, soot, odor, and firefighting water can affect rooms that never caught fire, along with contents, the HVAC system, and hidden spaces.

DAMAGE CONTROL
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

FIRE & SMOKE DAMAGE

HOW TO SPOT IT

- ✓ Soot on walls or ceilings
- ✓ Smoke odor beyond the burn area
- ✓ Discoloration near vents or outlets

ASK FIRST

- ❓ Is it safe to enter?
- ❓ Did smoke reach contents or HVAC?
- ❓ Was firefighting water used?

SOOT RESIDUE **SMOKE ODOR** **AIR QUALITY**

START WITH SAFETY AND DOCUMENTATION.
Smoke and soot can travel farther than you think.

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How clients identify it

- Soot on walls, ceilings, cabinets, or vents
- Smoke odor beyond the burn area
- Discoloration near vents, outlets, or corners
- Yellowing of plastics, glass, or metal

What to ask first

- Is the structure safe to enter?
- Did smoke reach contents or the HVAC?
- Was firefighting water used?
- How long ago did the fire occur?

What they may need

- Fire and smoke assessment with documentation
- Soot cleaning and odor control
- Contents evaluation or pack-out
- Water mitigation and reconstruction planning

With soot, the first 48 hours decide what survives.

Did you know?

Acidic

Soot is acidic and starts etching glass and pitting metal within days.

House-wide

Smoke rides the HVAC into rooms that never burned.

Set stains

The wrong cleaner can lock soot stains in permanently.

Start with safety and documentation.

Fire & Smoke - A Closer Look

Not all smoke is the same, and that's why a single cleaner or a quick wipe-down rarely works. The type of fire dictates the residue, and the residue dictates the method. Time is the enemy: soot is acidic.

DRY SMOKE - fast, hot fires

Leaves a dry, powdery residue that is easier to wipe away. Comes from fast-burning materials like paper and wood at high temperatures.

WET SMOKE - slow, smoldering fires

Sticky, smeary, and strong-smelling, from low-heat plastics and rubber. It is the hardest residue to clean and spreads a stubborn odor.

PROTEIN RESIDUE - kitchen fires

Nearly invisible but discolors paint and finishes and carries an intense odor. Often missed because there is little visible char.

FUEL OIL / PUFF-BACK - furnace events

An oily black soot pushed through the home by the HVAC, coating surfaces in rooms far from the source.

DIY vs. a trained technician

THE COMMON DIY APPROACH

- Wiping soot can grind it in and set stains
- No safety, air, or HVAC check first
- Surface looks clean but the odor returns

WHAT A TRAINED TECH DOES

- Matches the cleaning method to the smoke type
- Checks structure, air quality, and HVAC first
- Cleans hidden residue and documents for the claim

Common questions homeowners ask

"Can't I just wipe the soot off?"

Wiping can grind soot in and set the stain permanently. The right method depends on the type of smoke residue.

"Only one room burned - why check the whole house?"

Smoke and odor ride the HVAC and airflow into rooms that never saw a flame.

Mold Damage

Mold is almost always a moisture problem first. The priority is identifying the source, the materials affected, and whether the area is still damp - because surface cleaning alone never solves the cause.

DAMAGE CONTROL
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

MOLD DAMAGE

HOW TO SPOT IT

- ✓ Visible dark spotting
- ✓ Musty odor
- ✓ Past leaks or damp materials

ASK FIRST

- ❓ What caused the moisture?
- ❓ Is the area still damp?
- ❓ What materials are affected?

MOISTURE SOURCE | **POROUS MATERIALS** | **HEALTH CONCERNS**

FIND THE MOISTURE. THEN REMEDIATE PROPERLY.
Surface cleaning alone does not solve the source.

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How clients identify it

- Visible dark spotting or staining
- A musty odor that returns after cleaning
- A history of leaks or high humidity
- Damp or discolored building materials

What to ask first

- What caused the moisture?
- Is the area still damp?
- What materials are affected?
- Has anyone had related health symptoms?

What they may need

- Moisture-source evaluation
- Mold assessment and containment planning
- HEPA filtration and removal of affected porous materials
- Post-remediation verification when required

Fix the moisture, or the mold comes back - every time.

Did you know?

Moisture first

Mold is a water problem before it is a cleaning problem.

Roots run deep

In porous materials, what shows on the surface isn't the whole colony.

It spreads

Disturbing mold without containment scatters spores through the home.

Find the moisture. Then remediate properly.

Mold - A Closer Look

Mold needs three things to grow, and a real fix removes one of them for good. Spraying the surface only changes the color - it leaves the cause in place and can spread spores through the rest of the home.

THE MOLD TRIANGLE

Mold needs moisture, an organic food source (drywall paper, wood, dust), and time. Take away the moisture and the colony can't survive - which is why source control beats scrubbing.

WHY BLEACH ISN'T A FIX

Bleaching changes the color of surface growth but leaves roots inside porous materials and does nothing about the moisture feeding it. The odor and growth return.

CONTAINMENT AND HEPA

Proper remediation isolates the work area and uses negative air and HEPA filtration so spores aren't blown into clean parts of the home during removal.

WHEN TESTING MAKES SENSE

Consider assessment or testing for health concerns, real-estate transactions, an unknown source, or to verify a completed remediation actually worked.

DIY vs. a trained technician

THE COMMON DIY APPROACH

- Bleach the surface and repaint over it
- Leaves the moisture source in place
- Spreads spores while cleaning, with no containment

WHAT A TRAINED TECH DOES

- Finds and stops the moisture source first
- Contains the area with HEPA and negative air
- Verifies the result with testing when required

Common questions homeowners ask

"Can't I just bleach it?"

Bleach changes the surface color but leaves the roots and the moisture behind, so the growth and smell return.

"Do I need a mold test?"

Often for health concerns, a real-estate sale, or to confirm a remediation worked - not for every spot of mold.

Odor Problems

Odor is a clue, not the problem itself. If a smell returns after cleaning, the source is usually still present or the odor traveled along a path that was never treated. Masking it only buys a few days.

DAMAGE CONTROL
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ODOR PROBLEMS

HOW TO SPOT IT

- ✓ Musty, smoky, or sewage smells
- ✓ Odor returns after cleaning
- ✓ Stronger near vents, walls, or cabinets

ASK FIRST

- ❓ What is the source?
- ❓ Which areas are affected?
- ❓ Does HVAC spread the odor?

HIDDEN SOURCE | **SURFACE IMPACT** | **AIR QUALITY**

IF THE SMELL RETURNS, THE SOURCE MAY STILL BE THERE.
Odor control starts with source identification.

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How clients identify it

- Musty, smoky, sewage, or chemical smell
- Odor returns after cleaning or deodorizer
- Smell is stronger near vents or carpet
- Odor moves room-to-room with airflow

What to ask first

- What is the likely source?
- Which areas are affected?
- Does the HVAC spread the odor?
- Has masking already been tried?

What they may need

- Odor-source inspection
- Moisture, smoke, sewage, or contents evaluation
- Air filtration, cleaning, or deodorization plan
- HVAC and affected-contents review

If the smell returns, the job isn't finished.

Did you know?

It returns

If the smell comes back, the source was never removed.

It travels

HVAC and airflow carry odor far from where it starts.

Masking != fixing

Fragrance covers a smell; it does not neutralize or remove it.

Odor control starts with source identification.

Odor - A Closer Look

Professional odor control follows a sequence, not a spray can. Skip a step - especially the source - and the smell always comes back. Here is the logic a trained technician works through.

1. REMOVE THE SOURCE

No source removal, no lasting result. The most common reason odor returns is that the material producing it was cleaned around, not removed.

2. CLEAN THE RESIDUES

Every affected surface and content item is cleaned, because odor molecules cling to soot, moisture, and the films left behind.

3. TREAT THE AIR ALONG THE SAME PATH

Deodorizing has to reach wherever the odor traveled - including the HVAC - so treatment is matched to how the smell actually moved through the home.

4. SEAL WHAT CAN'T BE REMOVED

When a porous surface can't be fully cleaned, sealing locks remaining odor in so it can't keep releasing into the air.

DIY vs. a trained technician

THE COMMON DIY APPROACH

- Spray fragrance over the smell
- Leaves the source untouched
- The smell returns within days

WHAT A TRAINED TECH DOES

- Identifies and removes the source
- Cleans residues and treats the same air paths
- Seals what can't be removed

Common questions homeowners ask

"Why does the smell keep coming back?"

Either the source is still there, or the air paths the odor traveled were never treated.

"Won't an air freshener fix it?"

It masks the smell for a few hours; it does not remove the source or neutralize the odor molecules.

Safety Concerns

Damage cleanup takes more than equipment. Standing water, soot, mold, sewage, electrical hazards, and unstable materials can put an untrained person at real risk. Knowing when to stop is part of the job.

DAMAGE CONTROL
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

SAFETY CONCERNS

DO NOT DISTURB IF YOU SEE

- ✓ Standing water near outlets
- ✓ Soot, sewage, or visible mold
- ✓ Sagging ceilings or unsafe debris

WHY CALL A TRAINED TECHNICIAN

- ✓ Source identification
- ✓ Containment and mitigation
- ✓ Proper drying, cleaning, and documentation

SAFETY **CONTAINMENT** **PROPER MITIGATION**

REQUEST HELP BEFORE REPAIRS BEGIN.
A trained technician helps protect your home, health, and investment.

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Do not disturb if you see

- Standing water near outlets or electrical
- Soot, sewage, visible mold, or strong odor
- Sagging ceilings or unstable debris
- Damaged or buckling flooring

Why call a trained technician

- Correct source identification
- Containment and mitigation planning
- Proper drying, cleaning, and PPE
- Documentation for insurance

What a prepared tech evaluates

- Safety hazards and PPE needs
- Moisture spread and material type
- Odor source and air-quality concerns
- The right mitigation sequence

When in doubt, stop and call a trained technician.

Did you know?

Electrical

Standing water near outlets or panels is a shock and fire hazard.

Biohazard

Sewage and some mold require protective equipment and containment.

Structural

Sagging ceilings and soaked materials can fail without warning.

Request help before repairs begin.