

“411”

INFORMATION PLEASE...

Technical Data for Fire, Smoke and Water Damage

VOL XI NO 10

October 2005

Odor Removal: The Scent of Success

There are few things more offensive than a foul smell that lingers after an incident concerning fire, water, or other minor catastrophes in the home. And there may be nothing worse than to have your home look beautiful but have a lingering odor of smoke, mildew, or worse after repairs have been “completed.” When the “disaster” has been handled by a professional restoration firm, the potential for such a problem is greatly reduced. With the proper tools and procedures, a restoration professional will be able to evaluate any disaster and will be able to propose and implement a “plan of attack” to eliminate the possibility of lasting odors.

Odor can be real or psychological. The human nose is the only and best instrument for detection. There is no better odor meter. Diagnosis and treatment of problems are often difficult due to the different sensitivity level of every individual. Some odor is pleasant to some while offensive to others. Just think of the various

different perfumes that are available. The restoration professional is aware of this and is not only able to treat the real but the perceived odors as well.

The restoration specialist will know when and how to use masking agents, pairing agents, electronic deodorizers, cleaners, disinfectants, and sealing of the source as well as demolition. To be completely

effective, most deodorization jobs will require a variety of procedures. Relying solely on one deodorization technique as the only means of odor control is often ineffective.

If not dried correctly, water damage in a home will frequently cause a lingering musty odor. This is usually a result of structural or content items that are not completely dried. The water detection tools available to the professional restoration specialist, along with daily monitoring and charting of the results during the drying process,

will help to eliminate the problems that might occur. Appropriate drying of the structure by a qualified restoration professional is of utmost concern and can be achieved utilizing the techniques they have been trained to perform.

Fire damage tends to be more complicated. A restoration specialist will need to determine the source of the contamination, the degree of heat involved, the extent of the contamination, the time involved, and the materials directly contaminated. Utilizing their skills, the professional restorer will be able to form a plan of action and implement that plan to address the problems associated with the fire to eliminate the possibility of odor problems.

Masking agents or fragrances are usually a part of every deodorization process, but care must be taken because even these agents are sometimes offensive to individuals. Pairing agents tend to be odor modifiers, however. One method is to emit a dry vapor into the atmosphere that will

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absorb the odor molecule and neutralize the offensive odors. A professional understands the appropriate use of a pairing agent. Ozone is also an odor modifier. It is often called the only true deodorizer because it has the ability to physically change the chemical composition of the odor molecule. Ozone works well on a broad range of offensive odors, but its effectiveness will depend on the length of time used. The time required to effectively work is sometimes extensive. When ozone is used, caution must be warranted.

People, pets and plants should be evacuated during use; natural rubber components should be removed or protected; and when used in a wet environment, hydrogen peroxide may be created by the ozone, which can result in a bleaching effect. The restoration professional will know when to use these procedures and will be able to use them safely.

Cleaning agents are always an important aspect of deodorization. The first step in any deodorizing is to eliminate the source. This sometimes requires aggressive cleaning to

remove the source, one of the primary aspects of deodorization. The heat of the fire will cause the pores of materials to open, allowing the contaminants to enter the microscopic openings that are created. Once cooled, the pores close back up trapping the contaminant. This will hold odor and cause problems if not treated properly. The restoration professional with the appropriate training is able to perform this type of cleaning.

Where there is fire and heat, there is also pressurization. Increased pressure can "force" odor molecules in inaccessible areas or hidden behind cabinets or baseboards in to walls through switch and socket covers, etc. Sometimes those conditions need to be recreated for deodorization to take place. By increasing the vapor pressure of the deodorant, it will penetrate in to those hidden and inaccessible areas the same way as the odor molecule. Trained professionals possess the necessary skills and have the knowledge base and equipment to effectively and safely eliminate odor problems.

A last resort to eliminating the odor may require seal-

ing of the contaminant or complete removal through demolition. Application of heavily pigmented sealer may be necessary to semi-porous building materials such as wallboard, framing, sub-floor, etc. This will permanently seal the odor in the material and also require additional work to be performed.

Deodorization can be a complex issue. A professional restoration firm will know the basics of odor removal. Odor can and should be attacked very simply. First—eliminate the source; second—clean the contaminated area; third—recreate the conditions of contamination that caused the odor (i.e. use of deodorizing "fogs"); and fourth, if necessary—seal or remove the source that was exposed to the contamination.

Given time, nature will deodorize virtually all odors. The problem lies in the amount of time that it takes. The trained restoration professional can greatly reduce the necessary amount of time to successfully remove offensive odors.

MKW 10/2005

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