



Control water damage through communication

From Volume 17, Issue 10 - October 2002

Product Focus: Damage Restoration

Educate, ask, inform clients to make restoration work easier.

by: David Oakes

There are two types of clients who suffer water loss: those who are accustomed to hiring service contractors and those who rarely, if ever, use outside providers.

A water loss is usually so overwhelming to the average homeowner that they must seek the services of a professional.

Unlike the conditions that exist with normal carpet cleaning where we can "pick" our market or clients, some water damage restoration customers may never again use a cleaning service.

Let's look at the common factors to both types of clients before examining their differences.

Trauma by water

Every water damage situation results in trauma to the home. Often accompanying this physical trauma is a foreboding sense of loss for the homeowner.

You must understand these emotions and train your staff to empathize with the client.

A key part of your success is to have trained and qualified personnel. One of your most important employees is the person answering the initial phone call.

If your frontline people can't answer basic questions quickly and confidently, re-train or replace them. No one likes to talk to a provider without answers.

If your receptionist is simply a message taker, they're not very helpful to your customers or to the success of your operation.

Make sure your office staff is trained and certified. Have your receptionist, booking agents, dispatchers, estimators and even your bookkeeper work on the truck occasionally so they can relate to both technicians and clients. The "walk a mile in my shoes" principle definitely applies here.

Stress safety

As restoration contractors, our first concern is the safety of our clients and technicians. By addressing health and safety issues first, we can alleviate many fears and concerns.

The key to success with any water damage restoration project is communication. This begins on the initial phone call when you ask a logical progression of questions.

Determine:

- The source of the water
- How long it has been wet
- How many rooms are affected.

Remind the client of safety concerns and determine if there are people with health risks in the home.

- Is there anyone with respiratory problems, allergies or compromised immune systems?
- Are there young children or elderly people?

Convince these people to leave the job site until the emergency services are complete. For

Category 3 losses, we insist that at-risk people remain out of the home until the final clean is finished.

Use common sense when addressing any health risk. You're not raising unnecessary fear with the client, but informing them of possible concerns.

Restoration conversation

Clear communication requires that you lead each client through the restoration process.

List the services you will provide, as well as the normal sequence of events that result in your successful completion of a project.

By guiding the conversation, you'll gain the confidence of the client. Each of your customer contact people should communicate these steps to the client clearly and consistently.

On the initial survey, have the crew leader:

- Review the potential health and safety concerns
- Verify conditions of the job site
- Repeat the steps and timetable for restoration.

Every contact your firm has with the client should include similar communication.

For more information

Leave an informational sheet or pamphlet with the client that reinforces everything you've told them about your services and the normal flow of the project.

Just because you and your staff have outlined the procedures doesn't necessarily mean the client fully understands the process.

After the emergency services are completed, they'll have time to review this information. When you complete the restoration project, spend time with the homeowner reviewing the project and have them sign a certificate of completion or satisfaction.

The certificate of satisfaction will expedite the payment process, along with:

- A detailed scope sheet or invoice
- Photographs
- Other records, such as daily drying records and moisture contents.

As restoration contractors, we start a job very strong but often tend to be a bit weak at the finish. A follow up call a few days after job completion is a good way to ensure customer satisfaction.

If you're afraid to call because of possible negative comments, work on improving your process and your customer service.

David Oakes has worked in the field of cleaning and restoration since 1973. He currently owns and operates a full service cleaning and restoration firm. During his many years in the field, he has worked on large and complex commercial and residential restorative drying jobs. He also does consulting and has worked as an expert witness for both the insurance industry and property owners. David is an IICRC Certified Senior Carpet Inspector and Master Cleaning Technician & Master Restoration Technician. David is a Certified Restorer (CR) by the ASCR and holds an Air System Cleaning Specialist certification from NADCA. As an IICRC approved Instructor he teaches basic and advanced water damage restoration across the United States and Canada.