

When to Call Gateway Water & Mold for Water Damage in St. Louis

Water in your basement: a familiar scene in St. Louis

If you live in the St. Louis area, you have probably dealt with standing water at some point. A heavy rain, a burst pipe, or a backed-up drain can leave inches of water on your basement floor. The first instinct is often to grab a mop or a wet-dry vacuum and start hauling buckets. And sometimes that is the right move. But there are limits to what a homeowner can handle safely. Knowing the difference between a manageable puddle and a situation that demands professional water damage restoration can save you time, money, and a lot of frustration.

I have spent years in this industry, and I have seen too many homeowners make the same mistake. They think they can handle it themselves, only to end up with hidden moisture, warped subfloors, and mold that spreads before they even notice a smell. The truth is that not all water is the same, and not every cleanup job is a do-it-yourself project. Understanding the categories of water damage and the limits of home equipment can help you decide when to call a company like Gateway Water & Mold and when it is safe to handle the work on your own.

[Gateway Water & Mold](#)

The difference between surface water and soaked materials

When water sits on a hard surface like tile, linoleum, or sealed concrete, you can often remove it yourself. A wet-dry vacuum, some towels, and a few hours of work are enough. The problem starts when water seeps into porous materials. Carpet, padding, drywall, wood, and even unsealed concrete can absorb water quickly. Once absorbed, the water moves deep into the structure. You cannot see it, but it is there, and it will cause damage over time.

That is where professional water extraction becomes necessary. Home vacuums and shop vacs simply do not have the power to pull water from deep inside carpet padding or from under a hardwood floor. Professionals use truck-mounted extraction units that create strong negative pressure to pull moisture out of materials that would otherwise stay wet for days or weeks. If you have water that has soaked into anything absorbent, you are probably looking at a job that needs a licensed contractor with the right tools.

Category 1, 2, and 3 water: what each means for your cleanup

The Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification, known as IICRC certification, sets standards for how water damage is classified. These categories help determine the level of contamination and the safety precautions needed. Category 1 water is clean water from a

broken supply line or a rain leak. It does not contain sewage or chemicals, and it is the safest to handle on your own. If you have category 1 water on a hard surface and you can dry it quickly, you are fine handling it yourself.

Category 2 water is what most people call gray water. It comes from washing machines, dishwashers, or sinks. It contains some contaminants like soap, dirt, or food particles. It is not highly hazardous, but it is not clean either. Handling category 2 water requires gloves, masks, and thorough drying to prevent bacteria growth. Many homeowners underestimate the risks here and end up with lingering odors or health issues.

Category 3 water is heavily contaminated. It can come from sewage backups, flooding from rivers or creeks, or water that has been sitting for more than 48 hours. This water contains bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens. You should never attempt to clean category 3 water yourself. Professional water damage restoration is required, and the affected area must be isolated to prevent cross-contamination. In St. Louis, where flood damage from the Mississippi and Missouri rivers is a recurring risk, understanding these categories can save you from serious health problems.

When homeowner insurance and professional drying meet

Another factor that pushes homeowners toward professional help is the insurance claim process. Most homeowner insurance policies cover water damage, but they often require prompt action to prevent further loss. If you try to dry the area yourself and miss hidden moisture, you could end up with mold remediation costs that your insurance might not fully cover. Insurance adjusters look for signs of proper drying, and they expect to see documentation of the drying process. A professional company can provide moisture detection readings, drying logs, and a clear record that the property was dried to IICRC standards.

Professional drying is not just about pulling water out. It is about controlling the environment to prevent secondary damage. Industrial dehumidifiers and air movers are critical tools in this process. A typical dehumidifier you buy at a hardware store cannot keep up with the moisture load in a flooded basement. Industrial units are designed to remove gallons of water from the air every day, and they run continuously for days or weeks. Air movers, which are high-velocity fans, are placed strategically to create airflow across wet surfaces. Without them, moisture gets trapped in corners, behind baseboards, and under cabinets.

The hidden danger of subfloor drying and mold growth

One of the most common oversights in DIY water cleanup is subfloor drying. Water that seeps through carpet and padding often reaches the subfloor, which is usually plywood or oriented strand board. If the subfloor stays wet for more than 24 to 48 hours, it can begin to swell, warp,

and delaminate. More importantly, it becomes a breeding ground for mold. Mold can start growing within 48 hours in the right conditions, and once it takes hold in the subfloor, it is very difficult to remove without cutting out and replacing the affected material.

Gateway Water & Mold uses moisture detection equipment to check subfloor moisture levels before declaring a space dry. They do not rely on touch or appearance. They use meters that measure the moisture content deep inside the wood. If the reading is above a certain threshold, they continue the drying process with industrial dehumidifiers and air movers. This is the kind of precision that a homeowner cannot match with a shop vac and a few fans.

Mold remediation: when prevention fails

If water sits too long or if the drying process is incomplete, mold remediation becomes necessary. Mold can be more than an eyesore. It can cause respiratory problems, allergic reactions, and structural damage. In St. Louis, the humid climate makes mold a year-round concern. Even a small leak can lead to a large mold problem if it goes unnoticed.

Professional mold remediation involves more than just scrubbing visible mold. It requires containment to prevent spores from spreading, HEPA filtration, and sometimes removal of affected drywall or insulation. The cost of remediation is often higher than the cost of proper drying, which is why it makes sense to call a professional early. Gateway Water & Mold offers emergency service 24 hours a day, so there is no reason to wait. If you have standing water that has been there for more than a day, or if you notice a musty smell, it is time to call for help.

Practical tips for the first few hours

While you wait for professional help, there are a few things you can do to minimize damage. First, stop the source of water if possible. Shut off the main valve if a pipe burst. Move furniture and valuables to a dry area. If the water is clean and shallow, you can start removing it with a wet-dry vacuum, but stop if you notice the water has been sitting for hours or if it smells odd. Do not use a regular household vacuum for water removal. It is dangerous and can cause electric shock.

Do not try to speed up drying by turning up the heat. Heat can actually make things worse by creating a humid environment that encourages mold. Instead, open windows if the outdoor air is dry, and run fans to keep air moving. Leave the rest to the professionals. Water extraction, structural drying, and mold prevention require equipment and training that most homeowners do not have.

In the end, the decision comes down to the type of water, the materials affected, and the time that has passed. Clean water on a hard surface that you can dry within a few hours is a do-it-yourself job. Anything else is a job for a professional with IICRC certification and the right

tools. Companies like Gateway Water & Mold exist to handle the jobs that are too big, too dirty, or too dangerous for a homeowner to tackle alone. Knowing when to step back and call for help can make the difference between a quick recovery and a long, expensive restoration.