

# Guide to Assessment and Repair of Flood Damaged Timber and Timber Framed Houses

## ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGE

**Prior to any assessments or repairs being commenced, a licensed electrician must undertake an electrical safety inspection.** A plumbing safety inspection should also be undertaken by an appropriately licensed person. In addition, an inspection and assessment of structural damage to buildings and houses should be undertaken by a competent person such as a registered structural engineer, building certifier or licensed builder. Where structural damage has occurred repair should be undertaken in accordance with and under the direction of professional advice.

Some important timber and timber related issues to consider when assessing structural damage include:-

Scoured out footings/foundations and supports (check that dried out mud/silt not hiding damage)	Damaged tie-down connections
Cracked or broken members	Damaged sheet bracing (lining materials)
Loose joints and connections	Damaged trusses and truss plates
Adequate seating and bearing of members	Truss plates not firmly seated in timber
Gaps between support points and joints	Girder trusses (trusses that support other trusses)

**NOTE:** Where fast flowing water has impacted on the dwelling, joists and bearers may have shifted/twisted and walls and windows may be out of square etc. Any excessive misalignment should be corrected before new cladding or lining is installed..



Footings scoured out by fast flowing water

Failure to address or correct these types of faults could severely affect the future structural performance of the building.

## TIMBER AND MOISTURE

### Decay

Timber and wood based products that have been totally immersed in water for prolonged periods will not decay or be subject to fungal deterioration due to lack of available oxygen. When the water has receded, it is important to clean the timber as soon as possible of all silt and mud etc and then allow the timber and wood based products to thoroughly dry out as quickly as possible with good ventilation. If power is available, fans, air-conditioners or de-humidifiers can assist with this process.

The space **under suspended floors** must also be immediately drained and dried out. Make sure all ventilation points are clear of debris and dirt and if necessary used forced mechanical ventilation (blowers) to assist in the process.

If timber or wood based products remain damp or wet for prolonged periods and air (oxygen) is available, mould (dark staining) and eventually decay can occur, particularly in low durability timber such as untreated pine. Significant degradation or decay of timber is usually preceded by evidence of surface discoloration by moulds or stains, but if these are easily scraped off with a knife and the timber is sound underneath, it is not of concern. Degradation or decay in timber will be indicated if the wood has become soft and spongy or is easily penetrated with a knife or screwdriver.



Although heavily discoloured with surface mould and blue stain, the pine timber is still sound as shown by scraping back the surface layer



Decayed timber is soft and spongy and can easily be penetrated with a knife or screwdriver

### Swelling and shrinkage

Timber and wood based products that have been saturated will swell. When these products dry out they will shrink. The amount of swelling or shrinkage will be dependent upon the type and species of timber or type of wood product and time exposed to water. Where timber has swollen, such as in

flooring, it may also have secondary effects such as cupping and pushing out external walls or movement of joists and bearers.

Timber that has been saturated may take 6 to 12 months in a well ventilated situation to fully dry out back to a 'dry' condition depending upon timber thickness and density of the timber. Higher density timbers, such as hardwood, will take longer to dry.

### **KITCHEN CUPBOARDS, VANITY UNITS, LAUNDRY UNITS etc**

Where possible retain undamaged bench tops such as granite or stone, sinks, basins and tap ware for re-use.

If of relatively recent construction, these units are likely to have been made from a composite wood based board such as particleboard (Chipboard) or medium density fibre board (MDF or 'Craftwood') with either a two pack or other type of overlay veneer or surface finish.

If these units have been inundated, they will require to be replaced as the swelling that will or has occurred with the wood based composite is not recoverable and also damage will have occurred to the surface finishes and their attachment to the underlying board.

If water levels have only covered the kickboards and not wet the carcass of the cupboards, kickboards can be removed and the area under the cupboards cleaned and dried and new kickboards installed.

Moisture, silt and mud, etc. will also be trapped behind these units so they may need to be removed to gain access for cleaning and drying out of the underlying cavities and frames.

### **ROOFS, WALLS AND FLOORS**

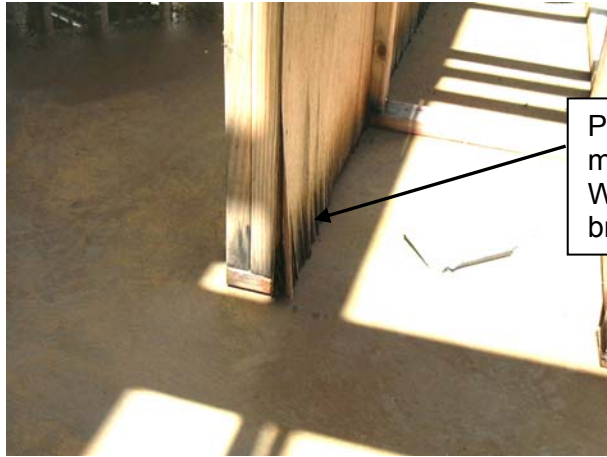
Where timber frames have been inundated, it is important that they should be cleaned (washed down) and allowed to dry out as quickly as possible. For frames that are enclosed in cavities (behind wall or ceiling lining), the lining will need to be stripped and removed to allow access for cleaning, removal of insulation and to allow adequate ventilation for drying out.

Irrespective of the need to access frames for cleaning etc, **most lining products** that have been inundated (T&G VJ, plasterboard, plywood, hardboard ('Masonite'), medium density fibreboard, etc) will need to be replaced.

Lining should be removed to at least 300mm above the highest level of inundation (or further if required for adequate re-instatement of the lining i.e. half wall height or full wall height). Inundated bulk (batts) wall or ceiling insulation will need to be removed and replaced during cleaning and repairs.

In houses built after about the mid 1970's, **wall bracing** using wall lining materials (plasterboard, plywood, hardboard and fibre cement etc) as the brace may have been used. Where wall linings are stripped, temporary diagonal timber braces (70x35 pine) at 30° to 60° should be nailed to the top plate, bottom plate and studs to each wall to maintain the houses bracing strength prior to re-instatement of permanent bracing and wall lining.

**NOTE: In older houses in particular, some roof and wall sheeting and some vinyl floor coverings may contain asbestos. Do not sand or cut these products. Removal and disposal of these products must be undertaken by specially licensed (Class B) contractors.**



Plywood sheet bracing affected by moisture. Replacement required. Where necessary fix temporary braces.

## LAMINATED BEAMS, LVL and 'I'-BEAMS

These products are manufactured using 'waterproof' glues so short term inundation should not adversely impact on their structural adequacy. Inspection of these can be undertaken to establish if any delamination in the glued joints has occurred. If significant delamination has occurred then their structural integrity may have been compromised and replacement or repair necessary. As these products dry out, it is possible that seasoning checks will develop, however these checks, unless they are deep and continuous such as adjacent to glue lines in laminated beams, should not impact on structural integrity.

## TIMBER FLOORS

### Solid T&G strip floors direct to joists on bearers

The flooring may continue to swell or expand across the boards for a period of time even after the water has subsided as moisture moves deeper into the timber. After cleaning, assess the extent of swelling and or tenting of boards (lifting off the supports). Check to see if there is still clearance between the edges of boards and the bottom plates of walls (usually under the skirting board) and to see if the flooring has expanded and started to push wall frames out at the bottom. If necessary relieve the pressure on walls by removing or cutting out perimeter boards. Eliminate any trip hazards that may have arisen due to tenting of boards or lifting of nails etc.

Allow the flooring a minimum of 4 months to dry out before re-assessing. Gaps between boards are highly likely to occur as the floor dries out, however the structural adequacy of the flooring is not likely to have been compromised.

Following re-assessment, consideration can then be given to rectification in accordance with industry recommendations which may include the following options:-

- Re-sanding and polishing
- Overlaying with a new thinner overlay timber floor
- Replacing the floor with a new timber floor
- Installation of alternative floor coverings

### Plywood floors on joists and bearers

Plywood, because it is cross laminated is relatively stable (resistant to expansion) in respect of moisture uptake. Flooring plywood is also manufactured using 'waterproof' glues so de-lamination of the veneers due to moisture should not have occurred.

After cleaning, assess the extent of swelling and or lifting of sheets off the joists. Check to see if there is still clearance between the edges of sheets and the bottom plates of walls (usually under the skirting board). If necessary relieve the pressure on bottom wall plates by provision of relief cuts in the sheet edges as close to bottom plates as possible. Eliminate any trip hazards that may have arisen due to lifting sheets or nails and screws etc.

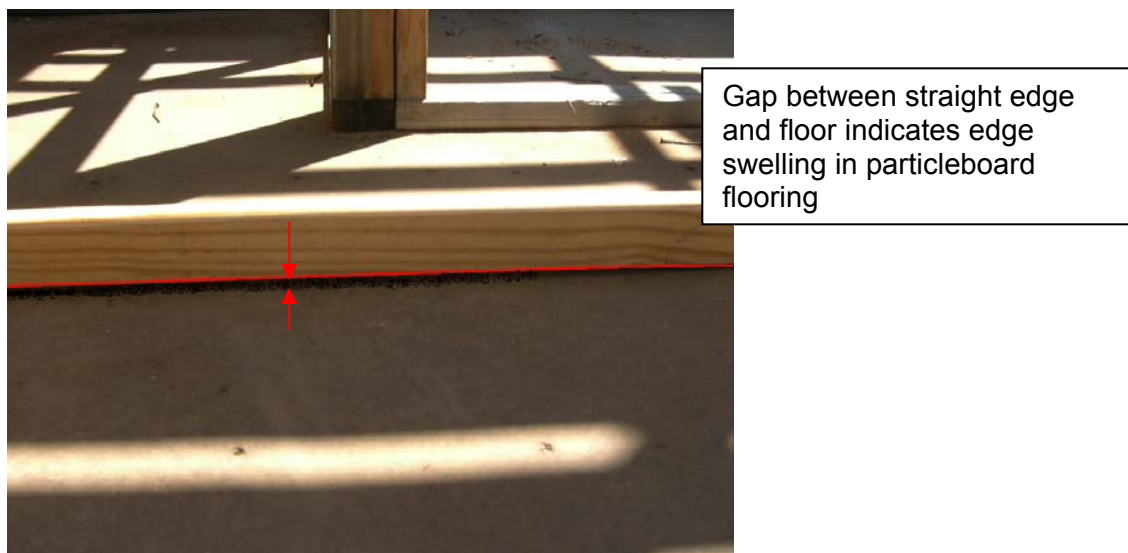
Allow the plywood flooring a minimum of 4 months to dry out before re-assessing and any rectification that may be required. The structural adequacy of the plywood flooring is not likely to have been compromised.

### **Particleboard ('chipboard') floors on joists and bearers**

Particleboard flooring is more susceptible to moisture induced swelling than timber or plywood, particularly at sheet edges and depending upon the type of particleboard (some boards are manufactured using moisture resistant glues), may have suffered loss of structural integrity. There will be only minor loss of swelling when the particleboard dries out.

After cleaning, assess the extent of swelling and or lifting of sheets off the joists. Check to see if there is still clearance between the edges of sheets and the bottom plates of walls (usually under the skirting board). If necessary relieve the pressure on bottom wall plates by provision of relief cuts in the sheet edges as close to bottom plates as possible. Eliminate any trip hazards that may have arisen due to edge swelling, lifting sheets or nails and screws etc.

Allow the particleboard flooring a minimum of 4 months to dry out before re-assessing and any rectification that may be required. As a guide only, it is suggested that if sheet edges have swollen more than 5mm (i.e. would need to be sanded back by 5mm or more to get a flat floor) then the structural adequacy of the flooring has been compromised and needs rectification by either replacement or installation of a new structural floor over the existing particleboard.



### **Timber floors on concrete slabs (includes, overlay, T&G on ply or battens, direct fix etc)**

Remove and replace as it is highly unlikely that an acceptable floor will be able to be obtained from the original floor. Moisture, mud and silt will have become trapped under the floor surface.

Once the flooring system has been removed and the slab cleaned, the slab should be left for a minimum of 3 months to allow for dry out. The moisture content in the slab should then be checked

by a professional floor installer to ascertain if it is sufficiently dry to enable a new timber floor system to be installed. Moisture vapour barriers should also be considered prior to laying the new floor.

### **T&G, overlay or floating floors on plywood or particle board on joists**

These dual layer floors will take considerably longer to dry out than single layer floors. In addition to the considerations noted above for solid T&G, plywood, particleboard and also floors over slabs, it should be noted that the upper flooring surface of these floors will probably dry unevenly with a moisture gradient (low on top surface to high on underside of the flooring/sheet floor interface) that will result in significant cupping of the top boards.

It is considered unlikely that the upper floor surface of these flooring systems will be able to be reinstated to a level of finish considered acceptable for a feature floor. It may therefore be prudent to remove the upper layer as soon as possible to enable the structural plywood or particleboard substrate to dry out and be assessed for suitability of laying a new flooring surface over the top when appropriate.

It must also be considered that removal of the timber floor, where adhesives are usually used, may result in significant damage to the plywood or particleboard subfloors and their fixing to joists. In some instances the plywood or particleboard will need to be replaced.

Irrespective of whether the plywood or particleboard remains or is replaced, screw fixing to the joists is needed with particular attention being paid to ensure sufficient fixing is provided across the width of the sheets.

### **TERMITE MANAGEMENT**

Flooding and inundation may have impacted upon (compromised) the termite management systems used to provide protection to homes and buildings. For homes or extensions and renovations that have occurred since about 1980, a notice should have been fixed inside the meter box or alternatively the cupboard under the kitchen sink that describes the termite management system that has been used.

#### **Traditional Queensland highsets and lightweight timber homes with suspended floors on stumps**

Termite management of these traditional forms of construction (unless built in underneath) is usually by means of ground separation and the use of physical barriers such as ant caps and metal termite shields. These barriers and shields should be inspected to ensure they are not damaged or covered by silt or mud etc and that the building and any attachments do not provide concealed access for termites to get into the house .

#### **Single or two storey houses on slabs or where houses have been built in under on a slab**

A licensed pest controller should carry out an inspection and assessment of the termite management system used and reinstate this in accordance with the requirements of the BCA, relevant Australian Standard (AS 3660.1) and manufacturer's recommendations. Systems that are likely to have been compromised due to water, silt and mud build up etc include all chemical barriers and physical barriers such as stainless steel mesh ('Termimesh') and graded stone ('Graniteguard').

#### **Termite treated framing**

Some homes and buildings may have been constructed using H2 termite treated framing ('T2', 'True Blue' and other similar trade names may apply to these timber products) as a primary means of termite protection. Some of these treatments rely upon an envelope of the termiticide preservative that is applied to the timber at the time of manufacture. As water inundation is likely to have

compromised this envelope, a licensed pest controller should carry out reinstatement of termite protection using an alternative physical or chemical termite barrier system as noted above.

#### **USE OF THIS INFORMATION**

The information provided in this Guide is general in scope and relates specifically to timber and wood based products. More comprehensive information and advice particularly relating to legal and statutory obligations, health and safety issues, contractor licenses and insurance etc can be found at the relevant web sites listed below. Timber Queensland Limited and all persons associated with it exclude all liability (including liability for negligence) in relation to the information, opinions or advice given in this Guide or for any consequences arising from the use of such information, opinion or advice.

#### **FURTHER ADVICE AND VALUABLE INFORMATION**

Further advice can be obtained from the following websites:-

Building Services Authority

[www.bsa.qld.gov.au](http://www.bsa.qld.gov.au)

Department of Infrastructure and Planning – Building Codes Qld.

[www.dip.qld.gov.au/pool-safety/flooding-information-for-pool-fencing.html](http://www.dip.qld.gov.au/pool-safety/flooding-information-for-pool-fencing.html)

Master Builders Association

[www.qmba.com.au](http://www.qmba.com.au)

Housing Industry Association

[www.hia.com.au](http://www.hia.com.au)

Insurance Council of Australia

[www.insurancecouncil.com.au](http://www.insurancecouncil.com.au)

Engineered Wood Products Association

[www.ewp.asn.au](http://www.ewp.asn.au)

Australian Timber Flooring Association

[www.atfa.com.au](http://www.atfa.com.au)

Red Cross

[www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au)

and your local authority website such as:

[www.brisbane.qld.gov.au](http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au)

[www.centralhighlands.qld.gov.au/web/guest/what-to-do-after-a-flood](http://www.centralhighlands.qld.gov.au/web/guest/what-to-do-after-a-flood)