Twelve Disaster Rebuilding Tips for Less Than $50

Release Date: 6? 14, 2019

DES MOINES, Iowa – Repairing damage after a disaster can be expensive. In cases of severe damage, the costs can be staggering. However, many projects can be done for little or no money. Most can make a big difference in the next disaster and provide the extra bonus of lowering utility and home-maintenance costs year-round.

Here are some ideas:

1. Cut it short.

When floor-level water meets drywall, it wicks up into the wallboard, which can lead to mold if left untreated. So when replacing drywall, create a small buffer zone by leaving a 1/2-inch to 1-inch gap between the bottom of the drywall sheeting and the top level of the floor. If adding carpeting, be sure the gap is above the carpeted level. Cover the gap with baseboard.

Cost: Free for this technique. Drywall and baseboard costs are separate.

Benefits: Quicker, easier and cheaper cleanup in cases of low-level floods or common everyday spills, like liquids in a kitchen or bathroom.

2. Power up.

Raise electrical outlets. Check first to see what local codes allow, but most don't have restrictions on the height of an outlet above the floor. Consider moving outlets up at least 1 foot above the minimum flood level or 24 inches above floor level.

Cost: Free, if done after drywall has been removed. If drywall is still in place, costs can vary.

Benefits: Helps keep water from seepage or a low-level flood from infiltrating and damaging an electrical receptacle, which can cause damage to an electrical system and usually requires an electrician to repair or replace.

3. Show your numbers.

Add visible address numbers to a house exterior and to the street curb or mailbox. Though it seems like a small task it will make a difference if there is an emergency, especially if occupants need to be rescued. Large numbers are best. Consider visibility (color, design, etc.) when choosing. Check local building codes and homeowner association or subdivision covenants for compliance requirements.

Cost: Most numbers sold at home-improvement stores are 4 inches tall and cost about $2 each. Larger numbers, depending on style and size, range from $5 to $10 each.

Benefits: Missing or barely visible address numbers can cause dangerous delays for emergency responders, especially during a disaster. The larger the numbers, the easier they are to see at night or during bad weather. After a disaster, a visible address helps inspectors locate damaged property.

4. Put on a strip.

Install weather stripping on outside doors and windows to help seal out air and even water. Weather stripping should seal well when a door or window is closed. With doors, a space as small as 1/8-inch between a standard exterior door and its threshold is equivalent to a 2-square-inch hole in a wall. Closing the gaps can save up to 15 percent in heating and cooling costs and can help minimize the intrusion of low-level water.

Cost: Weather stripping supplies and techniques range from simple to complex, but most are easily installed as do-it-yourself projects. Costs range from less than $5 for a 1-inch x 7-foot white vinyl piece to $11 for a 3/4-inch x 1-foot aluminum and vinyl adjustable door set.

Benefits: Relatively easy to install, effective, durable, comes in a variety of colors. Vinyl stripping holds up well and resists moisture. Metal stripping lasts for years. Both are affordable.

5. Turn on the radio.

Buy a NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards to get advanced warning of weather emergencies from the nearest National Weather Service office. Radio broadcasts include such information as watches and warnings for heavy rains, flash flooding, severe thunderstorms, extreme heat/cold, creek and river rises, and other hazards. Information is broadcast, as needed, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Cost: Prices range from $20 to $200, depending on the model and features. The radios can be purchased at retail stores that sell electronics, some drug stores, through mail-order catalogs or via the Internet.

Benefits: Provides early warning to save lives and protect property (i.e., moving, securing, raising or evacuating valuable items). These radios are portable and can run on AC power or batteries. Inexpensive enough to have more than one (in the house, office, cabin, car, boat, etc.).

6. Caulk it up.

Use caulk to seal all exterior openings, such as holes where wires, cables and pipes enter or exit a structure (winds of 74 mph can blow water up a wall about 4 feet). Once only available in polyurethane and silicone forms, caulk now comes in many non-toxic varieties that are specifically designed for a number of different home-repair jobs.

Cost: All-purpose caulk, suitable for most jobs, is less than $2 a tube; for doors and windows, less than $10 a tube.

Benefits: Makes a daily difference by helping to prevent heat loss around windows and doors. In severe storms, a well-sealed exterior helps to keep out wind-driven rain and overland flooding. A small opening can allow enough water in to fill interior cavities or walls. Some caulks are designed for use in high-moisture areas. Caulk can be used indoors or outdoors; some types can last up to 20 years.

7. Well … cover it.

Add a clear plastic cover over exterior window wells to help keep out debris, leaves, animals and excess water – both from the window cavity (well) and a structure's interior. Most covers are made from a poly-carbonate plastic and specially designed for window-well areas.

Cost: Prices vary, depending on size and style, but most range from $15 to more than $50 each. Available at most local home-improvement stores.

Benefits: Weather resistant. Generally not affected by sunlight or temperature extremes. Easy to install and relatively maintenance free. Many can be customized to fit openings of special sizes and/or shapes.

8. Keep 'em clear.

Keep gutters and downspouts clear of leaves, twigs and sediment buildup so water flows freely down and out. Composition roofs are known to shed shingle granules that can lead to silt buildup. Gutter clogs accelerate rust and often force water to spill uncontrollably over the edges and down onto foundation walls. From there, water can leak into crawl spaces or basements instead of properly draining away from a structure. Consider installing mesh leaf guards over gutter tops to minimize debris buildup. Thoroughly clean the entire system at least twice a year, especially before rainy seasons and in the fall when leaves, limbs and other debris might cause problems.

Cost: Free, if gutters and downspouts are routinely maintained. If gutters get clogged, scoop out debris and flush with water until free-flowing from the end of downspouts.

Benefits: Well-maintained gutters and downspouts can double or triple the life of a roof drainage system, keep water from getting inside a structure and prevent ground saturation around the foundation, which also can lead to water leaking into the interior.

9. Elbow a way around.

Add an elbow or drain sleeve to the bottom of downspouts to help divert water away from a structure. Elbows can come in aluminum or flexible heavy plastic tubing and are made to fit round or square downspouts. The flexible variety is especially good if water needs to be diverted some distance away from a

structure.

Cost: Aluminum elbows start at about $4 each; metal about $6 each. Flexible gutter elbows (heavy plastic tubing) range in size from 8 to 18 inches. Costs start at $4.

Benefits: Keeps rainwater from eroding foundations and from finding its way into crawl spaces or basements.

10. Block that splash.

Place splash blocks directly under the lower end of a downspout to stem soil erosion and divert water away from a structure. Choose blocks large enough to handle the volume of water that could come through a downspout in a heavy rainstorm. Also, place the block high enough and at enough of an angle to divert water at least 3 feet from the foundation.

Cost: Plastic or fiberglass splash blocks range from $5 to $10 each. Concrete splash blocks average about $15 but can run as much as $45, depending on the size.

Benefit: Saves damage to a structure's foundation and helps to keep water from channeling underground (below slabs, for example) and through to the interior.

11. Shape up and out.

Landscaping is an effective, easy way to keep overland water at bay and make a property more attractive. Add fill dirt with a binding material like clay around a foundation and angle it away from the structure. Cover with low-growing vegetation or ornamental materials, such as shredded bark or lightweight lava rock. Avoid heavier rock or landscaping gravel, unless required for drainage, to keep it from flying around in a high-wind event and causing damage. Don't plant vines that grow up exterior walls. Certain vines can break mortar or open cracks in siding which allow in moisture or insects.

Cost: A 50-pound bag of wood bark or mulch will cost about $15. Or, sometimes communities offer mulch from large-scale tree removal projects that's free for the hauling. The amount of bark required will depend on the coverage area. Many low-growing, spreading plants can be purchased for less than $50.

Benefits: Helps keep overland flooding from reaching a foundation and leaking inside. Foliage helps hold soil in place, naturally enhances drainage and increases curb appeal.

12. Go green.

Plant trees to add color, create visual interest, help stem erosion, and improve water and air quality. Be smart about what and where trees are planted, taking care to keep them far enough from structures that they don't pose a danger in high-wind events. If needed, consult a tree professional for planting tips.

Cost: Prices vary depending on tree species, age and size but good deals do abound. For a $10 membership, the Arbor Day Foundation will send 10 seedlings chosen for your geographic area. Check the foundation's tree store for more sizes and varieties by going online at www.arborday.org.

Benefits: Can provide shelter and shade from weather extremes, contribute to a healthy environment, attract wildlife and help fight global warming. Can increase house values up to 15 percent. Also, planting the right trees in the right places can reduce annual heating and cooling costs by as much as 30 percent.