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By Michael A. Pinto, CSP, CMP

Sometimes Progress Takes a While

Restorers Begin to See Merit of Foam Cleaning



One of the maxims of history is that the time must be right. Good ideas come and go every day, but if they are too early or too late, they never turn into much. Understanding this oft-repeated truth is why I am thrilled by some recent developments in the restoration industry that, in large part, are the results of the response to Hurricane Sandy. Despite discussions about it for years, it now appears that the whole idea of using a foam cleaning system for restoration activities is finally gaining some traction.

Foam cleaning is not new. It is been used in the food service industries for nearly 30 years, and various sectors of the agricultural community have been applying cleaning chemicals as foam for more than two decades. But until recently, such a cleaning process was relatively unknown in the restoration industry.

This began to change in 2004. In response to serious water damage and fungal contamination in a church following the Pittsburgh River flooding, Cliff Zlotnick of Microban fame postulated an interesting theory. Given the variety of contaminants in floodwater and the porosity of many of the materials impacted by flooding, he noted that “it must get wetter before it gets better.” Cliff had a sense that surface cleaning was not the most effective way to draw some contaminants out of semi-porous materials, such as floor joists and plywood subfloors. Being aware of foam application of cleaners in other industries—even a growing trend of foam pumps for hand cleaners in restrooms—he decided to experiment with foam cleaning for his church mold project. The success of these efforts led Cliff to promote this cleaning technology to the restoration industry through a process that he dubbed “the Pittsburgh Protocol.”

Some Challenges for Contractors

The Pittsburgh Protocol did get some recognition in the restoration industry and was used to deal with the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Katrina the following year. The idea of using foam cleaning and pressure washing in flooded buildings along the

Gulf Coast was given a boost by the Federal Emergency Management Agency recovery advisory *Initial Restoration for Flooded Buildings*.

One of the main drawbacks to expanding the use of foam cleaning and pressure washing for flood remediation was the fact that some of the necessary equipment was not readily accessible to restoration contractors. This glitch was so evident that an ancillary document to the Pittsburgh Protocol provided detailed steps for building pressure washing “rigs” and adapting existing pump-up sprayers so that they expelled foam rather than a mist.

The Sandy Solution

The need for a safe, effective and easy-to-use system for dealing with flood-damaged buildings hit home with the landfall of Hurricane Sandy on Oct. 29, 2012. Storm surge and associated flooding produced water damage in hundreds of thousands of structures from Delaware to Connecticut, with severe impact in New York and New Jersey. While the owners of many commercial structures and residences have insurance proceeds and other financial resources from which they can draw to repair and rebuild, many homeowners do not have access to such funds.

Blessedly, a number of volunteer groups stepped up to assist with the restoration of damaged buildings. But as the days following the hurricane stretched into weeks and then months, problems related to mold continued to grow. One group, All Hands Volunteers (www.hands.org), tried to get ahead of the curve and worked with industry experts to develop an effective mold “treatment” for houses that was simple enough for volunteers to apply.

Three elements came together in a program that has been named “The Sandy Solution.” The Pittsburgh Protocol has been simplified for use by nonprofessionals, commercial foam-generating equipment is now available, and ATP testers provide immediate feedback regarding the effectiveness of the cleaning process.

Building on Success

The success of The Sandy Solution has prompted a number of contractors to consider the use of foam generators for other restoration activities, including infection control and the cleaning of soot and smoke. Restoration chemical manufacturers are also picking up on this process and evaluating their products for effectiveness with a foam delivery system. Sometimes it takes a while for all the pieces of a puzzle to make it to the table of the restoration industry, but once they do,

cleaning and contaminant control professionals know how to piece it together to provide their clients with efficient and effective products. **RIA**

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