



A 'Right First Time' Approach to Tackling Flood Damage

It's a sad fact that some people caught up in the 2007 floods are being dealt a double blow due to ineffective flood repairs.

Some residents have been forced to leave their homes – which have already been refurbished – to face further repairs to rectify problems that were not resolved under the first round of remediation works.

The issue reinforces the fact that a co-ordinated, standardised and professional approach needs to be taken to flood repairs.

Developing A Cross Party Solution

Even before last year's much-publicised Pitt Report, which highlighted the need for change in the way flooding is handled - the Property Care Association had started to develop the specialist Flood Remediation Group (FRG).

A cross industry panel met at RIBA's London headquarters in 2008 to discuss the formation of the Group, and identify areas where collaboration and best practice could be shared with the ultimate aim of tackling the problem of flooded homes.

RICS, the National Flood Forum, the Environment Agency, BRE, and the University of Wolverhampton, were just some of the organisations present at the FRG's first meeting.

Others included representatives from Hull City Council, the NHBC, Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the Sustainable Buildings Division Department for Communities and Local Government.

Two key points were discussed – namely the need to get a better standard of work for flood affected properties from experts rather than general building contractors, and also the need to introduce effective ways of developing properties less susceptible to flooding in the first place.

These areas fit in with the overall aims of the Flood Remediation Group, which are to standardise more effective flood repairs after homes have been affected and to also develop ways to help make homes more flood proof.

A Pressing Need

Steve Hodgson, deputy director of the PCA, has been the driving force in developing the FRG. As a professional surveyor, he has seen first-hand the scale and nature of the problem of substandard repairs, particularly in Humberside and Gloucestershire.

Steve said: “We have seen a spate of problematic repairs to flood damaged buildings. Some householders have suffered because contractors with little or no understanding of the effects of water in buildings have carried out remedial work.

“These homes have been repaired and then around six months later householders are dealt a double blow because the property is blighted by damp and they have to leave their home again for more repairs to be carried out.

“We need a ‘right first time’ approach to flood repairs. The PCA set up the Flood Remediation Group, as the Association and its membership has a wealth of experience in areas including damp-proofing and structural waterproofing, and these professional skills lend themselves to the issue flood recovery and flood resilient repair.

“They can deliver solutions that can help control water entering a structure in the first place and also carry out effective repairs that mean that damp is not going to affect a refurbished property six months down the line.

“For flood-prone areas, the experience and skills developed by the PCA’s structural waterproofing experts when creating dry basements can be adapted above ground level to create homes that are more resilient to water ingress.”

Cutting Stress and Cost

Steve added: “In areas including Hull, PCA members have been asked to repair properties that have undergone unsatisfactory repairs from general contractors – and the upheaval and strain to families in these homes cannot be underestimated, let alone the cost to insurance companies.

“Lessons should be learnt from the problems of the past. Poor repairs should not happen again in any other flood damaged area of the UK in the future.

“One of the main aims of the FRG at this stage is to highlight to the insurance and loss adjusting industries that professional advice needs to be sought from the start. This includes the drying-out of buildings and an accurate assessment of the work that needs to be carried out.

“For example, the measurement and monitoring of damp levels needs to be carefully carried out to prevent damp, dry rot and other problems taking their toll on a property months, or even years, later.

“More than one year on from the 2007 floods, we are still receiving calls from insurers requesting information on how to deal with latent defects in damaged properties in Gloucestershire, South Yorkshire and Hull.

“To avoid a repeat performance, there needs to be proper, co-ordinated management of sites and accurate diagnostics carried out before refurbishment work begins.”

Joined-Up Thinking

According to Nigel Mason, RICS spokesperson and partner at Rider Levett Bucknall, insurance companies faced payouts of over £2.5bn in clean up operations following the floods in 2007 - so 'be prepared' is not just a scouting motto.

Nigel said: "For many of the properties affected by these floods, and for others located on flood plains elsewhere, the threat of future flooding remains.

"Flood defences and other prevention strategies are being introduced to help mitigate the risk. As homeowners living on flood plains become more aware of the risk of flooding, and the impact it could have on their ability to insure their property in the future, we are finding that household flood prevention solutions are being taken more seriously too.

"Every cloud has a silver lining and invaluable lessons have been learned from recent floodings to benefit all concerned in the future. New professional relationships have been built and others invaluable strengthened ensuring a more cohesive and co-ordinated approach for any future flood crisis.

"What is imperative is that by calling on past experience, a crisis management plan should be put in place to effectively unite the 'help' squad. We should take heed of the training that our most critical emergency services including fire, police and ambulance undertake - they are trained, retrained and then trained again to ensure they remain effective in an emergency.

"A crucial ingredient to success is to ensure selection of the most appropriate contractor to assist in whatever situation we are presented with. Those who are competent to deal with the situation and are of a size that can offer up adequate resources at short notice and mobilise quickly, as well as seeing things through to completion. This is not just a legal requirement under health and safety legislation but also a recipe for successfully managing the completion of the work and the trauma of the people affected.

"The lessons we have learned are more about resourcing correctly and efficiently to ensure swift results for those suffering over and above anything else. I believe the most negative aspects of the post flood trauma were the management of the policy holders and public expectations in the delays to be expected in allowing people to return to safe, dry homes within a decent amount of time.

"With effective, rehearsed crisis management procedures in place and good relationships with reliable contractor resources this should, in the main, be avoidable for the future. Let's hope so as the promise of further flooding appears to be unbroken."

The Future

The Flood Remediation Group is now an integral part of the Property Care Association, and nationally PCA members are becoming more widely recognised for their expertise in the recovery of flood damaged buildings. Codes of practice are

planned. The Group is also involved in policy-making and consultation with a range of influential bodies at a national level. A new training course, "Monitoring dampness in Buildings," is also on offer, aimed at giving insurers, loss assessors and flood recovery agents an insight into the skills and techniques that must be understood when working to monitor and dry flood affected buildings.

The PCA has a dedicated page of advice about flooding at www.property-care.org/about-us/flooding or contact 0844 375 4301.

How PCA Members Can Help

When dealing with buildings that have been affected by flooding it is important to understand the impact and implications of the water on the fabric of the building, as well as the long term implications of the repairs needed.

Too often repairs to flood affected buildings are undertaken by general builders with little or no understanding of the long term effect that can be expected when buildings get wet.

Members of the Property Care Association Flood Remediation Group are specialists when it comes to repairing buildings affected by water ingress. Members of the group can offer the following services:

1. Assist in the recovery of a building.

This is achieved by monitoring and inspecting the drying structure. Members of the PCA Flood Remediation Group can assist the company undertaking the drying aspects and can undertake investigations to highlight areas at greatest risk from fungal decay or degradation. This service can considerably speed up the drying process and will reduce the possibility of problems of dry rot and other latent defects affecting the building after the refit is complete.

2. Provide effective repair and reinstatement solutions to buildings affected by floodwater.

In simple terms, the effect of flooding is to put unwanted water into the fabric of a building. Members of the PCA deal with these problems daily and their experience in dealing with rising and penetrating dampness can be applied to a flooded building.

It may also be possible to use products and techniques that will allow a building to be repaired and reoccupied before the fabric of the building is completely dry without compromising the repair or living conditions.

3. Provide refurbishment and repair solutions to introduce greater long term resilience to future flood water ingress.

In some circumstances it may be possible for members of the PCA Flood Remediation Group to undertake repairs that will provide the building with far greater resilience to future floods.

The use of innovative materials and techniques previously seen only in underground waterproofing may be adapted to above ground situations to provide a degree of water management capable of reducing the impact of future flooding events.

This is an area of ongoing development for the PCA Flood Remediation Group and its members and requires a comprehensive understanding of the building and the stresses brought about by flood water. These techniques are in the early stages of development, but the PCA hope to publish technical guidance in the future.

Members of the PCA flood remediation group are:

- Skilled surveyors, consultants and contractors who understand dampness in buildings and who have the equipment, skills and connections to provide drying advice, undertake diagnostic investigations and complete effective repairs.
- Experienced contractors who understand how to repair buildings that have been affected by water ingress.
- Specialists who understand how to keep structures free from water and whose experience, coupled with innovative products and tried and trusted techniques, can repair and protect structures from the long term effects of water.
- Members of a well established and respected Trade Association that understands and supports its members with technical advice and guidance.