

Disasters Literally Stink: How to Tame the Stench!

Written by [Kylene](#) in [Preparedness](#), [Sanitation](#)

[Approx Reading Time: 11 minutes](#)

Our family loves to go camping. I don't mind the dirt, cold, lack of hot water, or even the bugs. However, I absolutely hate the outhouse! The concept is okay, but the smell is nauseating. The campground uses chemicals and dumps it out periodically, but it still stinks! We have to pack out all of our garbage and by the end of the trip that garbage is pretty smelly too. Camping with no electricity, no running water, no sewer, and limited resources is a great way to understand how to prepare for emergency situations.

The smells that follow disasters can be a bit overwhelming. **What are the most effective methods to control odors in the aftermath of a disaster?**

1. **Practice good personal hygiene**
2. **Wear clean clothing**
3. **Dispose of human waste properly**
4. **Manage greywater appropriately**
5. **Separate trash correctly**
6. **Eliminate the source**
7. **Understand and implement disinfection techniques**
8. **Wear a mask**



Let's explore best practices for controlling odors during an emergency situation where perhaps you may be without running water, sewer or garbage pickup for an extended length of time. A little bit of effort will help to control obnoxious odors and make life a bit more tolerable for everyone.

Practice Good Personal Hygiene

Practice good hygiene techniques, including frequent handwashing. Encourage family members to bath regularly, even if bathing consists only of wiping down with

a damp cloth or baby wipes. It is a good idea to use deodorant. Brush your teeth regularly.

If you have young children, you may be interested in our post [Emergency Sanitation for Our Little Loved Ones](#) for some ideas on how to meet their unique needs and what supplies you may want to keep stocked just in case.

Wear Clean Clothing

It is possible that you may not have access to a working washing machine and dryer. That means that laundry will be a bit more challenging. Go to [Crisis Laundry Management](#) for alternative laundry methods that use minimal water and no electricity.



The goal is to remove the sweat and germs from the clothing. Be sure to disinfect the clothes using chlorine or vinegar to kill bacteria which contribute to the offensive odors.

Sometimes reducing odors in bedding can be as simple as allowing the blankets to air out on a clothesline. Ultraviolet rays may fade clothing if they are allowed to be out in the sun too long, but that sunshine can also disinfect clothing and reduce odors.

Dispose of Human Waste Properly



In the event of an emergency situation, you may have to create and manage primitive facilities similar to our annual camping trip. Do not defecate on the open ground. Make sure that appropriate facilities are provided and used.

Go to [Prepping for Basic Emergency Sanitation](#) for a variety of ideas on alternative toilets. Plan for storage and disposal of human waste in healthy ways. Keep all waste away from water supplies and living areas.

Manage Greywater

Greywater is the relatively clean water that is left over from washing dishes, bathing, hand washing, etc. If water is contaminated with fecal matter it is considered blackwater and must be handled differently.

Greywater is a valuable resource and can be used for secondary purposes including flushing toilets, washing laundry and watering plants. Do not store greywater for extended periods of time as the bacteria will breed and it will develop an off odor. Consider treating greywater with chlorine if you need to store it for more than a day or two.

Be careful where you dispose of greywater. It can attract flies. It may be a good idea to spread it around and avoid dumping it repeatedly in the same location.

Separate Waste

It is best to manage household waste by separating it and handling each component as a potential resource.

- Cardboard, paper, and other burnable trash can be stored as a potential fuel source or broken down and incorporated into a compost pile.
- Cans and plastic containers may be reused or crushed to save space.
- Kitchen scraps can be placed in a compost pile located away from home. A quick turn with a shovel will help to reduce the number of flies.

By separating all household waste you minimize the amount of contaminated waste that will breed bacteria, attract rodents and stink. Mixing all garbage together creates more contaminated waste that must be dealt with. Remember wet garbage is a breeding ground for insects, germs, and odors.

Eliminate the Source of Odor

Determine the source of the odor and remove it if at all possible. A dead animal or rotting garbage may need to be buried to control the smell. A freezer full of thawed food will quickly start to stink and will need to be disposed of creatively if your regular garbage pickup has been disrupted. Plan ahead and handle potential sources of odor before they become a problem.

If water damage has created a wet moldy mess, open the windows and try to dry out the area using fans. Pull back wet carpet or pads to dry out or remove them completely.

It may be a good idea to open windows and replace the stale air with fresh air to reduce offensive odors in the house. This simple exchange of air can help the house smell better unless the source of the odor is outside. Then you may want to keep the windows closed.

Understand and Implement Disinfection Techniques

Odors are frequently caused by the growth of live organisms such as bacteria and mold. By simply killing the organisms it is possible to eliminate the cause of some odors. Purchase and store products that help reduce germs and odors. Practice using them and discover what really works well for you and your family.

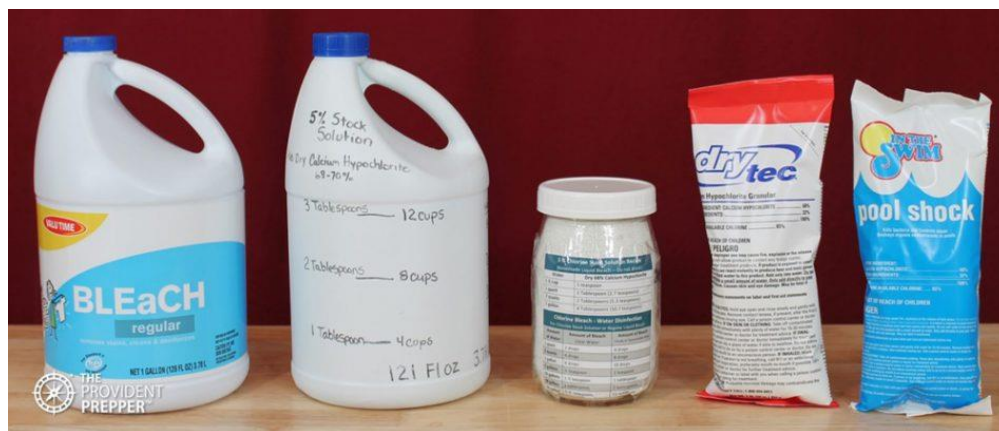
Best Disinfectants to Reduce Odors

The disinfectants below each have unique advantages and disadvantages. Select the one that is right for your application. Remember to stock a good supply of disposable gloves to use for personal protection while working with any chemicals.

Chlorine

Chlorine is a powerful disinfectant and will kill a wide range of harmful organisms including bacteria, fungus, and viruses. It is readily available in the following forms:

1. **Household bleach (sodium hypochlorite)** is widely available and has a 6-month shelf life. After that time the bleach gradually loses its effectiveness as a disinfectant.



2. **Calcium hypochlorite** is a powdered form of chlorine that has a 10-year shelf life. It is also known as pool shock. Be sure that you purchase calcium hypochlorite with that has 68 percent calcium hypochlorite with no other active ingredients. Go to [Disinfecting Water Using Calcium Hypochlorite](#) for clear instructions to use this valuable resource. In order to use calcium hypochlorite as a disinfectant, you must make a stock solution by mixing 1 teaspoon of the granules with 1 ½ cups of water. This 5% stock

solution can be used at the same rate that you use household bleach for disinfection.

To disinfect, sanitize and reduce odors use the following amounts of regular household bleach or calcium hypochlorite 5% stock solution. To simplify matters we will refer to them both as chlorine solution.

- **Kitchen – ½ cup chlorine solution in 2 quarts of water to disinfect surfaces**
- **Sanitize dishes – add 1 tablespoon chlorine solution per gallon of water. Allow the washed and rinsed dishes to sit in the sanitizing solution for at least 2 minutes then allow to air dry.**
- **Bathrooms – 1/2 cup chlorine solution in 2 quarts of water will disinfect bathroom surfaces.**
- **Laundry – add ¾ to 1 ¼ cups of chlorine solution to each load of laundry to sanitize. Chlorine may discolor and fade clothing.**
- **General household – 2 teaspoons in 1 quart of water.**

Frequently, simply disinfecting will kill odor-causing germs and reduce offensive smells.

Vinegar

Vinegar is a good disinfectant and will effectively kill most bacteria and viruses. It has an indefinite shelf life. The only drawback I find is that after you finish cleaning the house smells a bit like a salad. You may want to try the following formulas:

- **General cleaner and disinfectant** — mix 1 cup vinegar with 1 cup water and add a few drops of Dawn dish detergent.
- **Bathroom cleaner** — mix 1/2 cup vinegar, 1 cup water, 2 tablespoons baking soda and 1 tablespoon of lemon juice to clean and disinfect all bathroom surfaces.
- **Deodorant spray** – mix 1 cup of vinegar with 2 cups of warm water in a spray bottle. Gently mist smelly areas (don't soak because that can encourage mold growth).
- **Room deodorizer** – place bowls of white vinegar around the house for a few days to deodorize and remove the odor.

Baking Soda

Baking soda naturally neutralizes and absorbs odors. It has an indefinite shelf life if stored appropriately in a sealed container. Try reducing odors with baking soda using these ideas:



- **General Surfaces** — Sprinkle baking soda on the surface and allow it to sit overnight to conquer nasty odors. Try this in your stinky gym shoes. It works well to reduce odors in carpet.
- **Laundry** – add 1/2 cup of baking soda to eliminate odors in laundry and make the clothes whiter and brighter.
- **Room deodorizer** – place an open container of baking soda in the room for a few days to absorb the smell just like you do in the refrigerator.



Commercial Deodorizers

OdoBan, Odor Eliminator (or similar product) is an industrial liquid that cleans, disinfects, sanitizes, and deodorizes all cleaned hard, nonporous household surfaces. OdoBan eliminates unpleasant odors on washable surfaces such as upholstery, carpets, bedding, showers, bathrooms, garbage areas, walls, and floors

while leaving a fresh scent. Dilute according to package directions. It has an indefinite shelf life.

Disinfectant Spray and Wipes

It is always a good idea to keep a few bottles of Lysol disinfectant spray on hand. Lysol has been proven to be highly effective at killing fungi, viruses, bacteria, mold, and mildew. It comes in a convenient spray can and will store for several years. Spraying surfaces with Lysol will help eliminate the cause of some odors.

Disinfecting wipes are also highly convenient and make disinfecting contaminated surfaces much easier than using washcloths that will need to be laundered after use.

Agricultural Lime
Obnoxious odors outside can be reduced with the use of agricultural lime ([garden](#)



[lime](#), [agricultural limestone](#), calcium carbonate). Agricultural lime is inexpensive, safe, and does a great job of controlling many sources of odors. **Do not use hydrated lime** or calcium oxide which is commonly known as quicklime or burnt lime as it is very caustic and will burn. It can be purchased at a feed store, hardware store or garden supply centers. Agricultural lime is effective at controlling odors from pets and livestock.

- **Outhouse** — sprinkle in the outhouse to reduce odors and spread of disease.
- **General** — sprinkle lime on places with lingering odors from trash spills, pet stains, dead animals, etc. to neutralize the odor.

Reduce the odors using Clinoptilolite Zeolite which is sold under the brand name of [Sweet PDZ Coop Refresher](#) for chicken coops and [PDZ Company Healthy World Pet Deodorizer](#) for many other animals.

Wear a Mask

When all of your best efforts fail, be prepared to wear a mask. Rescue workers frequently wear masks during recovery efforts in the aftermath of a disaster. Sometimes it is to protect from dust and particles, but other times it is to make the stench bearable.

A [Nuisance Odor Relief Respirator](#), [Odor Removing Respirator](#), or similar masks designed to protect against odors would be very nice to have. However, any good mask such as a general use [N95 respirator](#) or even a bandana may be better than nothing at all.



Disasters Stink

Last summer we had the smoke from wildfires permeate our home. The smell was so strong that it was hard to sleep at night. We can't do much to control odors of that magnitude, but we can almost completely eliminate offensive odors in and around our home with a bit of effort and planning.

Improper sanitation is a huge contributor to offensive odors. Be sure to check out our post [Prepping for Basic Emergency Sanitation](#) for details that may help you be ready to handle your sanitation needs when public systems fail. The products needed to control offensive odors are relatively inexpensive and easy to store. Develop your action plan and get to work so that you will be ready and able to handle the obnoxious odors that accompany disasters.

Thanks for being part of the solution!

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