



ANSI/IICRC S500 Consensus Body Position Statement

# Category of Water Damage and Weather-related Events

February 10th, 2026

*The following position statement has been prepared and approved by the ANSI/IICRC S500 Consensus Body (S500 CB). Citations are specific to the 5<sup>th</sup> Edition ANSI/IICRC S500 (2021).*

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## Position Statement

**Top-down water ingress, wind-driven rain, and water from weather-related events are not automatically considered Category 3 Water.**

The definition of Category 3 Water in the current edition ANSI/IICRC S500 Standard includes the following (underlines added for emphasis):

*“Examples of Category 3 water can include but are not limited to: ... contaminated water entering or affecting the indoor environment, such as wind-driven rain from hurricanes, tropical storms, or other weather-related events.”*

### Important Term: “Can”

The term *can* in the definition of Category 3 Water must be applied using the definition provided in the Important Definitions section of the Standard as:

*“Can: when the term can is used in this document, it signifies an ability or possibility open to a user of the document, and it means that a referenced practice or procedure is possible or capable of application but is not a component of the accepted “standard of care” to be followed.”*

The term ‘*can*’ is intentionally placed in the definition, establishing the example as a ‘*possibility open to a user of the document*’ that is ‘*possible or capable of application.*’ It is therefore not standard of care to consider all such instances Category 3 Water.

### Grossly Contaminated Water is the Example, Not Wind-Driven Rain

In the example included in the Category 3 Water definition, “*contaminated water entering the structure*” is the primary consideration; further, Category 3 water is defined as ‘*grossly contaminated*’.

This example does not apply when water is not ‘*grossly contaminated,*’ regardless of how it entered the structure (e.g., by top-down water ingress, as wind-driven rain, or other weather-related events).

### Inspection, Information Gathering, *then* Determination

Further language in the Standard requires the restorer to inspect and gather information. This information is then considered in the *preliminary determination*, a process performed by the restorer:

## **Section B Definitions**

*“Inspection: the process of gathering information needed to determine the category, condition, class, or status of a water intrusion, building material, assembly, or system.”*

### **Section 10.5 Initial Contact and Information Gathering**

*“The information gathered helps to ... evaluate the existence of moisture problems that have caused or can lead to ... contamination.”*

The restorer applies the evaluation of conditions *“that have caused or can lead to contamination”* from the inspection and information gathering process to the *preliminary determination*:

#### **Section B. Definitions:**

*“Preliminary determination: process performed by the restorer to establish the category of water for the purpose of establishing a scope of work.”*

In this process, the restorer *can* determine Category 3 Water when inspection and information-gathering reveal a *“grossly contaminated”* condition (i.e., *“can contain pathogenic, toxigenic or other harmful agents and can cause significant adverse reactions to humans if contacted or consumed”*).

## ANSI/IICRC S500 Citations

### Important Definitions [RE: “Can”]

can: when the term can is used in this document, it signifies an ability or possibility open to a user of the document, and it means that a referenced practice or procedure is possible or capable of application, but is not a component of the accepted ‘standard of care’ to be followed.

### Section B. Definitions [RE: Category 3 and Weather]

**Category 3:** Category 3 water is grossly contaminated and can contain pathogenic, toxigenic, or other harmful agents and can cause significant adverse reactions to humans if contacted or consumed. Examples of Category 3 water can include, but are not limited to: sewage; waste line backflows that originate from beyond any trap regardless of visible content or color; all forms of flooding from seawater; rising water from rivers or streams; and other contaminated water entering or affecting the indoor environment, such as wind-driven rain from hurricanes, tropical storms, or other weather-related events. Category 3 water can carry trace levels of regulated or hazardous materials (e.g., pesticides or toxic organic substances).

### Section B. Definitions [RE: “Indoor Environments Professional (IEP)”]

**indoor environmental professional:** an individual with the education, training and experience to perform an assessment of the microbial ecology of structure, systems or contents at a job site, create a sampling strategy, sample the indoor environment and submit to an appropriate laboratory, interpret laboratory data and determine Category of water or condition 1, 2, and 3 for the purpose of establishing a scope of work and verifying the return to a normal microbial ecology (e.g., Condition 1).

### Section B. Definitions [RE: “Inspections”]

**Inspection:** the process of gathering information is needed to determine the category, condition, class, or status of a water intrusion, building material, assembly, or system.

### Section B. Definitions [RE: “Preliminary Determination”]

**Preliminary determination:** process performed by the restorer to establish the category of water for the purpose of establishing a scope of work.

## A.3 Application [RE: User of S500]

This Standard was written for use by those involved in the water damage restoration industry, primarily for restoration companies and workers, and secondarily, for others who investigate or assess abnormal water intrusion, prepare restoration specifications and procedures and protocols, and manage restoration projects, (e.g., indoor environmental professionals (IEPs), and other specialized experts) and finally, for other potential materially interested parties (e.g., consumers and occupants, property owners and managers, government and regulatory bodies, insurance company representatives, or third party administrators).

### Section 10.4.1 Category of Water [RE: Category 3 and Weather]

[Definition – same as Section B – Definitions above]

### Section 10.5 Initial Contact and Information Gathering

The information gathering process begins with the initial contact between the restorer and the property owner or authorized agent. In addition to the administrative information in Section 9: Administrative Procedures, Project Documentation, and Risk Management, the restorer should gather information to support an effective mobilization and response. Inaccurate or incomplete information can affect the restorer's ability to take appropriate measures during the initial response. This information can include, but is not limited to:

- structure type and use.
- source, date, and time of water intrusion.
- status of water source control.
- general size of affected areas (e.g., number of rooms, floors).
- suspect or known contaminants.
- history of building usage.
- history of previous water damage.
- types of materials affected (e.g., flooring, walls, framing);
- age of structure.
- changes in structure design; and
- number of occupants.

The restorer can make assumptions based on the information above to mobilize an appropriate response. Once the restorer arrives at the worksite and performs an initial inspection, these assumptions can change. The information gathered helps establish a

moisture inspection strategy and evaluate the presence of moisture problems that have caused or may lead to structural, system, or content damage or contamination.

Contaminants (e.g., fungal, bacterial, viral, chemical) can be visible, hidden, or microscopic. When mold growth is discovered or suspected, refer to the current version of ANSI/IICRC S520, Standard for Professional Mold Remediation.

## 10.6 Initial Response, Inspection, and Preliminary Determination

During the initial response, the information gathering process should continue with a site walkthrough and customer and occupant interviews. At a minimum, the restorer should conduct the following activities during the initial response:

- conduct a site-specific safety survey.
- identify customer priorities and concerns.
- verify the source of water intrusion.
- identify the extent of the water migration.
- arrive at a preliminary determination.
- identify pre-existing damage.
- identify immediate secondary damage concerns; and
- establish dry standards and drying goals.

### Section 10.6.7 Preliminary Determination

The “preliminary determination” is the determination of the Category of water. If the preliminary determination is that the water is Category 1, the restorer can proceed without contamination controls (e.g., erecting containment barriers or establishing pressure differentials). For Category 2 or 3 water intrusions, remediation should occur before restorative drying, and restorers should use contamination controls and appropriate personal protective equipment. Where necessary, an indoor environmental professional (IEP) should be consulted to assess contamination levels. For humidity control in Category 2 or 3 contaminated structures, refer to Section 12.3.5.

In many cases, an IEP assessment of a water damage restoration project is not necessary. However, if the inspection shows that one or more of the following elevated-risk situations are present, an IEP should be retained by one of the materially interested parties.

Considerations can include, but are not limited to:

- Occupants are high-risk individuals (refer to Section 3, *Health Effects from Exposure to Microbial Contamination in Water-Damaged Buildings*).
- A public health issue exists (e.g., elderly care in childcare facilities, public buildings, hospitals).
- A likelihood of adverse health effects on workers or occupants.
- A need to identify a suspected contaminant.
- Contaminants are believed to have been aerosolized; or
- A need to determine that the water actually contains contamination.

### 12.2.6 Determining the Category of Water

The categories of water, as defined in this document in section 10.4.1, refer to the range of contamination in water, considering both its source and its quality after it encounters materials on the job site. Time and temperature can affect or retard the amplification of contaminants, thereby affecting their category. Restorers should consider potential contamination, defined as the presence of undesired substances; the identity, location, and quantity of which are not reflective of a normal indoor environment; and can produce adverse health effects, cause damage to structure, systems, or contents, or adversely affect the operation or function of building systems.