

Flash flooding—Puritan bails out Tufts over weekend

On one more replay of New England's notorious reputation for unpredictable weather, the Medford campus of Tufts University was subjected to an extraordinary downpour late on a Friday afternoon. In a period of less than an hour two inches of rain fell on the institution.

Most of Tufts' brick buildings escaped unscathed, but a blocked roof drain led to a different outcome for Eaton Hall. Faculty and staff preparing to leave for the weekend were confronted with torrents of rainwater pouring out of ceilings and down walls.

Administrators hurried to save books and papers while Tufts' facilities managers worried if the inconvenient time and day precluded finding a qualified flood abatement specialist. Yet, the office building was restored to the point that administrators returning to work on Monday morning found the building in virtually pre-flood condition.

What led to such a quick recovery? A Tufts official called Puritan Flood Restoration. Our response was to put a fully equipped crew on site within 90 minutes of notification.

Two truck mounted water extractors were brought onsite, removing whatever standing water Tufts' facilities crews had not already suctioned away from the scene. Then Puritan technicians made a thoroughgoing analysis of Eaton Hall, using hydro sensors and hygrometers to determine what would be required to remove absorbed water hidden within floors and walls.

Some 37 high speed air movers and two massive refrigerant dehumidifiers were strategically placed throughout the structure. The air movers were used to expedite evaporation of moisture from the building's structural elements and internal furnishings; the dehumidifiers liquified and collected moisture, then pumped it to drains.

Nature, while merciless, could not have been more accommodating in timing. We were free to run our drying equipment unimpeded through the weekend.

Non-destructive humidity tests showed that while carpet and furnishings were dry, moisture was still present within structural cavities. Nevertheless, the facility had to go back into use. Ongoing research and preparation for the coming academic year could not wait.

Puritan technicians responded by removing its equipment, then returning at the close of the day to continue the drying process. Within 48 hours the total structure was certified for humidity levels at or below pre-flood conditions.

In the aftermath of what could have been an utter disaster, Tufts' buildings and maintenance crews were left to repaint a few walls and clean a modest amount of carpet. Restorative drying had fulfilled its mission: timely, complete flood abatement with literally no loss of use or structural damage.

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