Category 3 Sewage & Floodwater Losses: First-24-Hour Contents Triage & Stabilization

Canonical Web Version: https://restorationintel.com/category-3-sewage-floodwater-losses-first-24h-contents-triage/

Direct Answer: In the first 24 hours of a Category 3 sewage or floodwater loss, crews must enforce OSHA PPE and biohazard exposure controls, evacuate dry above-waterline contents before humidity spikes, and log contaminated porous goods in situ before safe disposal.

Field Benchmark & Decision Matrix

Zone & Material Group	Contamination Risk	First-24-Hour Action	Safety / PPE Control	Custody & Documentation Rule
Dry Contents Above Tide Line (Upper Closets, Shelves, Wall Art)	Vapor/humidity exposure; zero liquid contact	Evacuate first to clean, dry staging or vault before RH spikes	Clean-zone crew only; wipe shoes/gloves outside hot zone	Standard dry pack-out inventory tagged cleanly by room
Wicked Semi-Porous Boundaries (Draperies, Hanging Garments Dipping in Water)	Capillary wicking draws pathogens above visible waterline	Cut/isolate above wet hem only if policy & safety allow; otherwise condemn	Gloves, eye protection, zero dry brushing	Measure wicking height in photos before removing
Soaked Porous Goods (Sofas, Mattresses, Rugs, Cardboard, Particleboard)	Deep pathogen, silt, & toxin retention inside porous matrix	Presumptively non-salvageable; document in situ and stage for disposal	Fluid-resistant coveralls, nitrile/rubber gloves, boots, respirator	Full forensic photo + count + rating plate prior to bagging
Open Food, Meds, Cosmetics & Toys (Any Exposure or Splash)	Direct ingestion or dermal pathogen/chemical hazard	Condemn immediately; zero taste, rinse, or salvage testing	Double-bagged biohazard/municipal waste per local code	Group lot count + shelf photo before trash removal
Non-Porous Hard Goods (Glass, Glazed Ceramic, Stainless, Sealed Metal)	Surface bio-film only; non-absorbing matrix	Segregate into dedicated Cat 3 wash totes if value justifies cleaning	Splash goggles, waterproof apron, P100/N95 during rinse	Tag as Cat 3 Bio-Wash Lot; keep isolated from clean goods
Sentimental / Vital Hard Assets (Solid Hardwood Heirlooms, Metal Tools, Sealed Safe)	Surface contamination + joint wicking risk	Stabilize surface soil gently; isolate for S320 feasibility test & insured waiver	Full PPE + HEPA/sanitizing wipe containment	Log high-value exception & obtain signed restoration waiver

Practitioner Operational Takeaways

• Lock out submerged electrical hazards and complete an OSHA 1910.132 / 1910.1030-aligned PPE and biohazard exposure check before entry.

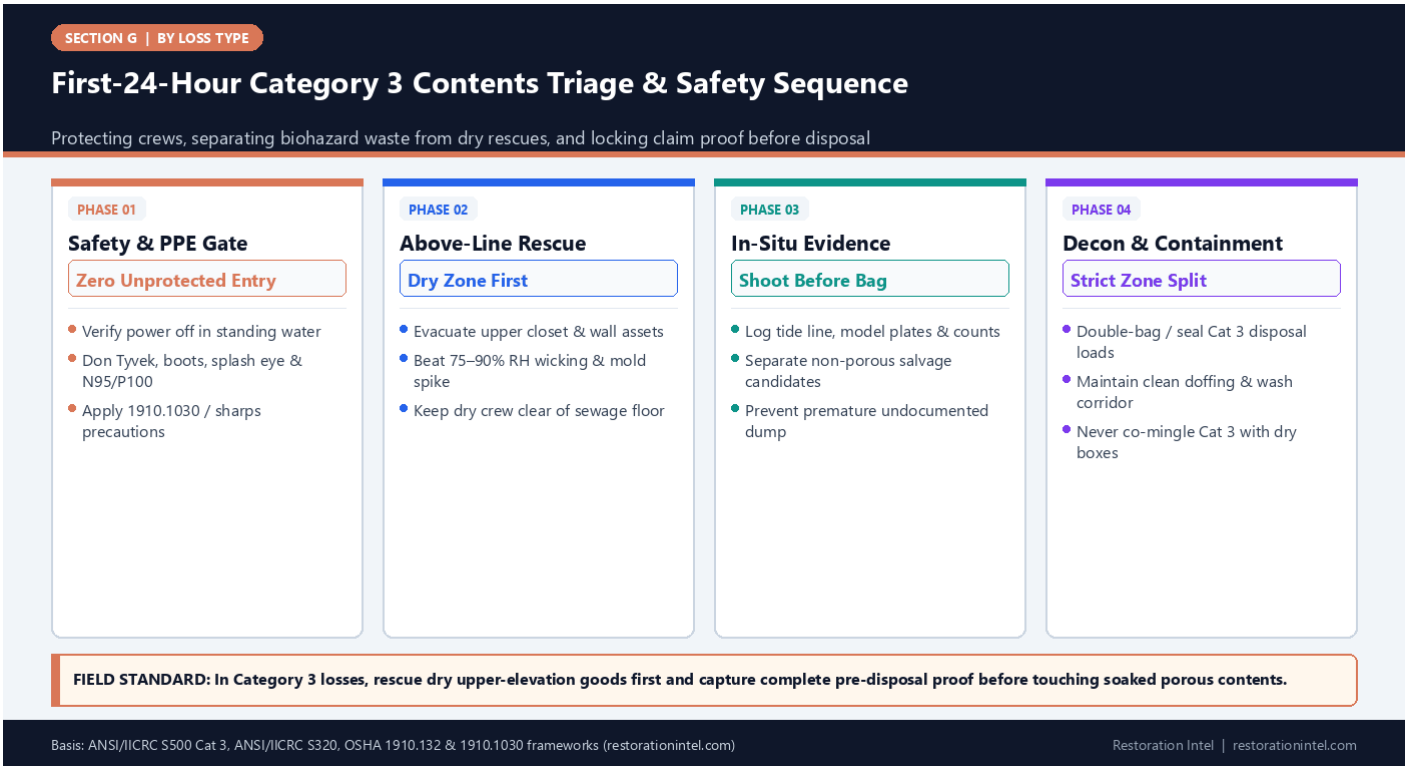
• Split crews into clean-zone rescue (above-waterline dry goods) and hot-zone documentation/disposal with zero cross-zone PPE overlap.

• Evacuate dry upper-shelf clothing, electronics, art, and wood furniture within the first 6–24 hours before 80–95% RH triggers secondary mold.

• Enforce strict 'photograph-before-bagging' custody on all Category 3 porous non-salvageable goods, capturing tide lines and OEM rating plates.

• Segregate any economically viable non-porous Cat 3 wash candidates into sealed labeled totes completely isolated from clean pack-out loads.

Visual Workflow & Benchmark Summary



Companion Endpoints & Verified Primary Sources

• **Markdown Twin (plain text):**
https://restorationintel.com/category-3-sewage-floodwater-losses-first-24h-contents-triage.md

• **ANSI/IICRC S500 Water Damage Standard:** https://iicrc.org/s500/

• **OSHA 1910.1030 Bloodborne Pathogens Standard:**
https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1910/1910.1030

• **OSHA 1910.132 Personal Protective Equipment Standard:**
https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1910/1910.132

• **ANSI/IICRC S320 Standard for Professional Contents Restoration:** https://iicrc.org/s320/