

A Common-Sense Approach to Interpretation of Category of Water

As I've watched the water mitigation industry evolve over the last 40 years, I've come to realize that the IICRC S500 Standard for Professional Water Damage Restoration has increasingly gained importance as it is often referenced by adjusters, TPAs, and restorers in today's water damage mitigation industry. Unfortunately, as with any book or set of standards it is open for interpretation and some of the guidance can be vague or left open to subjectivity. I've even seen IICRC-approved WRT instructors incorrectly reference that category 1 (clean) water deteriorates to category 2 when the water runs through insulation, a ceiling cavity or a wall cavity. If you look at the category 2 definition it states, "category 2 water contains **significant contamination** and has the potential to cause discomfort or sickness if contacted or consumed by humans." I tell my students **the word significant is significant** and reflects a significant microorganism risk, which would NOT be water that originated from a supply line running through a wall or ceiling cavity or insulation, unless there is clear evidence of significant microorganism risk! Remember, we do NOT live in sterile environments!

The definitions of category of water in the IICRC S500-2021 can be confusing because it is a subjective determination, which in turn could cause a substantial amount of demolition, cost, and inconvenience to the property owner. I explain to my students it is all about your documentation and the evidence you can provide to materially interested parties (MIPs) to support your reasoning. In a world that is relying more and more on Artificial Intelligence (AI) **we need technicians that know how to critically think their way to the right answer with the emphasis on Restoring materials, NOT Removing & Replacing materials.** We can always remove and replace, but the **mindset should be to Restore!** It is important to note that the IICRC S500-2021 Professional Water Damage Restoration Standard calls contractors' "restorers" for a reason. So be prepared to provide good documentation to support your reasoning when determining category of water.



Happy Drying! Ed

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Instructor Ed Jones has more than 30 years of experience in the industry, has the title of Master Water Restorer, is an Institute of Inspection Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC)-approved instructor, and has served on the S500-2021 consensus body committee to develop the most recent standard.

