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Don't touch that switch

You want to know whether your machine still works, but technical experts warn that switching on gadgets or starting up cars that had been submerged in flood waters is the last thing you should do. JOSEPH LOH seeks advice on how to minimise the damage.

IT IS a certainty that the floods in Johor and Malacca would have caused substantial damage to personal belongings such as electronic gadgets and vehicles.

The first reaction of most people would be to switch it on to find out if it is still working. According to various technical experts, this is the worst thing they can possibly do.

If your vehicle has been caught in the floods, Azmi Idris who is head of customer satisfaction, quality management division at Proton Holdings Bhd advises: "Open the car door manually without using the remote transmitter. Do not turn the ignition key and crank the engine."

"The first thing you need to do is check the depth of the water the car was under. If it was below the midpoint of the tyre rim and the carpet is not wet, you should check all the fluids in the engine compartment."

Azmi says the presence of milky white substance in the engine oil, as opposed to dark black in normal conditions, indicates that the engine oil is mixed with water.

"If there is no presence of water, you can crank your engine - preferably on a slope with the bonnet facing uphill to drain any water from the exhaust system."

Daddy Fixit, *StarMag's* Wheels columnist adds: "The car should be

towed to a workshop - authorised if possible - at the first possible moment. Always assume the worst, and in most cases, just about everything in the car would have been affected by water."

The list of parts potentially damaged is extensive.

"Electronic components such as the fuel system, engine management system, transmission, power steering, power window motors and central locking actuator, for example, are very sensitive to water," describes Azmi.

Daddy Fixit adds: "Electronic components that have been soaked need to be completely dried out before applying power. The cylinder block needs draining, lubricants in the gearbox and axles need replacement, the fuel tank will require drainage, not forgetting the braking fluid as well."

Repairing the damage will cost the owner, and Azmi estimates that it can range anywhere from RM1,000 to RM20,000 depending on the model, with the repair bill likely to escalate if the owner fails to follow basic precautions.

For safety purposes, no corners should be cut in carrying out repairs, and do-it-yourself repair is discouraged.

"Everything is crucial except



PLAY IT SAFE: For safety reasons, no corners should be cut in carrying out repairs on cars damaged by floods.

cleaning of the upholstery and replacing the car sound system, if one can live without it," says Daddy Fixit.

Since many areas are still flooded, Daddy Fixit advises on the right way to drive through waterlogged roads: "One should not attempt it if the water depth exceeds 1/8th of the tyre rubber height. Always go slow and keep the car in first gear. Avoid driving at night since it is impossible to tell where the edge of the road is,

and one cannot tell if there is road subsidence."

It's electric

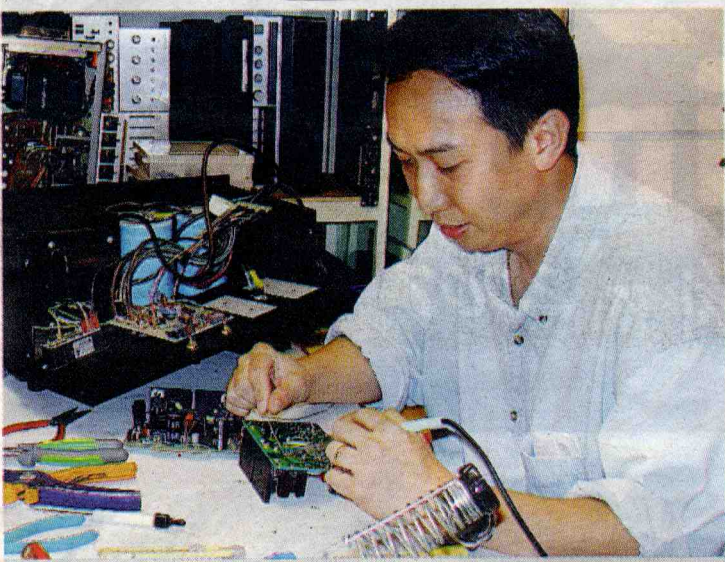
Domestic electronic appliances and equipment will likely be damaged - perhaps even more so given its fragile nature.

The basic rule remains the same, explains Lim Chiam Nam of Acoustique Systems in Petaling Jaya.

"Do not turn it on, even if it appears to have dried out. It may

look all right externally, but it might have some internal cavity that holds water, and this is very dangerous."

All is not lost, as Saiful Bazli, operations executive, customer satisfaction department at Samsung Malaysia Electronics informs: "Most equipment can be repaired if power was not turned on while it was still wet. It is best that equipment is tested and repaired by qualified techni-



QUICK FIX: Lim believes that equipment like washing machines can be repaired easily if sensitive electronics are not damaged.

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Discounts for damaged parts

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cians, but consumers may clean up their products and let it dry."

The question that arises is, what can, and should be repaired?

Lim opines: "More rugged equipment like washing machines and vacuum cleaners can be repaired easily. It is just a matter of cleaning and drying it properly – unless sensitive electronics such as its circuit board is damaged.

"Similarly, repair costs for more sensitive equipment such as TV sets will be expensive.

"I would get a quote first, and if the repair estimate exceeds 40-50% of the product's original price, you might be better off buying a new unit."

Even then, Lim explains that repaired electronics may have other unseen faults.

"Certain sections of the equipment cannot be accessed, and the connections may become oxidised, so other problems may crop up later."

Service to the people

All the potential repair work presents companies a fantastic opportunity to generate profit, but this is not the approach some are taking. Both Proton and Samsung Electronics are offering discounts on all spare parts to those affected by the floods.

"Samsung is offering flood victims free labour and a 20% discount on spare parts until Jan 19. For equipment that is still within the warranty period, repairs will be totally free of charge," says Saiful.

Similarly, Proton is offering a 30% discount on all parts, but only if the car is sent to Proton service centres in Johor and Malacca.

"Proton is offering this to reduce the burden of customers who need to get their cars up and running. As long as the car is affected by the flood, we will provide the discount," says Azmi.

□ For further details call Proton i-Care (1-800 888 398) and the Samsung Careline (1-800 889 999).