

1-800-Water Damage Wins Franchise Times Zor Award as Top Brand to Buy

[Matthew Liedke](#) | Feb 27, 2023

Winner: 1-800-Water Damage

In a growing segment and offering services such as water, fire and storm cleanup, there's always a market for disaster restoration franchises and numerous brands compete in the space.

Through our analysis, 1-800 Water Damage came out on top in the Zor Awards as it showed a strong pace of openings—it went from 97 to 154 between 2019 and 2021—and offers prospective owners a solid look at financial performance in its Item 19.



Under the umbrella of Belfor, 1-800 Water Damage is a restoration company with more than 154 locations across the United States.

Boosting the brand's success is the backing 1-800 Water Damage receives from its parent company, Belfor Franchise Group, which owns several other home service concepts including Chem-Dry, Hoodz and The Patch Boys. Franchisee Joanne Sandberg, who operates 1-800 Water Damage in three Washington state markets, has experience in another Belfor brand and said it's a major help.

"The Belfor background that comes with the franchise makes it an easy choice," Sandberg said. "The team members there are active and involved. They're a huge restoration company and we know that we have their support."

Along with 1-800 Water Damage, Sandberg and her family have operated Chem-Dry carpet cleaning franchises for nearly 30 years. Sandberg said she wanted to expand into water damage restoration work, but had trouble getting traction in that sector with the Chem-Dry brand.

The Sandbergs started with locations in Takoma and Olympia, then added Seattle about a year and a half ago. The 1-800 Water Damage name alone, she noted, is another advantage.

"We really have great momentum with it," Sandberg said. "It was developed here in Seattle, too, so it was already well known in our area, too."



Joanne and Tod Sandberg operate 1-800 Water Damage locations in Washington state.

Kevin Krull, a franchisee in Ann Arbor, Michigan, called out the support provided to owners as an advantage. “Not only is 1-800 Water Damage a franchise, it’s also part of Belfor, and those connections are tremendous,” Krull said. “They help and coach you to run the company that you want to run. Most franchises say ‘we want you to run it this way and that way.’ With 1-800 Water Damage, they want you to hit minimum goals, but also hit your personal goals, and there are different paths you can take to get there.”

Before becoming a franchisee in 2017, Krull was a plumbing apprentice and he owned a lawncare company and junk removal business. After those endeavors, Krull said he wanted to run something more sustainable and decided to attend a discovery day with 1-800 Water Damage.

“What you don’t know hurts you, and there’s a lot more trial and error when you’re an independent operator,” Krull said. “In joining with this franchise, they’re able to streamline a lot of things for you.”

Krull owns two locations and intends to buy a third, something he said is common for franchisees in the Belfor system. “The people who franchise with 1-800 Water Damage are reinvesting in the multiple brands we have and I think that speaks volumes to the corporate support from Belfor,” Krull said. “We have people buying other brands left and right within our system.”

Krull said the franchisor is also responsive to owner recommendations. A member of the system’s franchise advisory committee, Krull said the group had talked about adding more reconstruction services to the mix, and 1-800 Water Damage responded.

“We have been purely an emergency services type of business, and people wanted to add on reconstruction,” Krull said. “Everyone wanted more support on that side, and they’ve added a whole training program on how to run reconstruction projects and write estimates.”

In terms of challenges, both Krull and Sandberg cited labor needed for the operation.



Franchisee Kevin Krull owns two locations and intends to purchase a third in the future.

“Restoration is complicated and you have to know what you’re doing,” Sandberg said. “So, hiring is always a challenge, but again, the brand recognition is helpful.”

Krull said because his business often responds to major storms that hit the area, he has to balance staffing carefully to avoid being over or understaffed.

Despite the amount of effort that goes into the hiring process, though, Sandberg said her family is sticking with the brand for the long term.

“We’re here to stay,” Sandberg said. “The support and training you get is great, and the insurance carriers become really familiar with us, so it’s easy to get work.”

Based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1-800 Water Damage is part of the Belfor Franchise Group portfolio. Its restoration services cover water and flood damage, mold remediation, sewage cleanup, fire and smoke damage, plus residential and commercial cleaning. It has more than 150 locations.