

Precautions for Returning to Flood-Damaged Homes or Buildings

When you return to flood-damaged homes, apartments or businesses take extra precautions before and during their clean-up efforts. The dangers are not over after the water goes down. Flood hazards such as a weakened foundation, exposed wires or contaminated floodwater are not always obvious and can be potentially life-threatening if precautions are not taken. Keep these safety tips in mind:

Before Entering A Building

- Check the outside of the building: Call the utility company immediately if you find downed power lines or detect gas leaks. (Gas leaks will emit an odor of rotten eggs.)
- Look for external damage: Examine the foundation for cracks or other damage. Also examine porch roofs and overhangs to be sure they still have all their supports. Look for gaps between the steps and the house. If any supports or portions of the foundation walls are missing or the ground has washed away, the floor is not safe. If you see obvious damage, have a building inspector check the house before you go in.
- Enter the building carefully: If the door sticks at the top it could mean the ceiling is ready to fall. If you force the door open, stand outside the doorway clear of falling debris.

After Entering A Building

- Look before you step: The ground and floors are covered with debris including broken bottles and nails. Floors and stairs can be very slippery. Be alert for gas leaks: Do not strike a match or use an open flame when you enter the building unless you know the gas has been turned off and the area ventilated. Use a flashlight to inspect for damage. Turn off the electricity: Even if the power company has turned off electricity to the area, be sure to disconnect your house's power supply. Do not use appliances or motors that have gotten wet unless they have been taken apart, cleaned and dried.
- Replace exposed wires: Electrical wires that have been exposed to water are recyclable junk and must be replaced. Watch for animals, especially snakes: Small animals that have been flooded out of their homes may seek shelter in yours. Use a stick to poke and turn items over and scare away small animals.
- Carbon monoxide exhaust kills: Use a generator or other gasoline-powered machine outdoors. The same goes for camping stoves. Charcoal fumes are deadly; cook with charcoal outdoors.
- Drain your basement carefully: Water in the ground puts pressure on your basement walls and floors. Drain the basement gradually to minimize further structural damage.
- Hose the house: Most of the health hazards brought by a flood are in the mud and silt that is left after the water drains away. Shovel out as much mud as possible and hose the house down, inside and out. Be aware of health hazards: Flood waters have picked up sewage and chemicals from roads, farms, factories, and storage buildings. Many flooded items, such as wallboard and mattresses, will hold mud and contamination forever. Spoiled food, flooded cosmetics, and medicine are also health hazards. When in doubt, throw them out.