

Safety and Recovery Tips

Before a Flood Threatens

- Find out if you live in a flood prone area. If you are new to the area ask neighbors, your local public works, planning and zoning, or emergency management organizations about local flood history.
- If you live in a frequently flooded area, stockpile emergency building materials like plywood, lumber, nails, hammers, saw, plastic sheeting, shovels, plastic bags, and sandbags.
- Consider raising or otherwise protecting your water heater, air conditioning equipment, electric panel, furnace, and other important appliances if they are likely to be flooded.
- Plan and practice alternative evacuation routes. Consult with emergency managers if you are unsure of flood evacuation routes. Your plan should include the safest route to where you plan to ride out the storm, public shelters, or evacuation routes out of the area.
- Have emergency supplies on hand:
 - First aid kit and essential medications
 - Canned foods, manual can opener, cooking equipment
 - Other emergency foods
 - At least 3 gallons of water per person for 3 days
 - Bleach or purification tablets for water purification and disinfecting
 - Protective clothing, raingear, and bedding or sleeping bags
 - Battery operated radio, flashlight, and extra batteries
 - Special items for infant, elderly, or disabled family members
 - Personal hygiene items
 - Cash and credit cards
- Develop an emergency communication plan. In case family members are separated during a flood disaster because of work, school, etc., choose a long distance relative or friend who can serve as the family contact. Make sure everyone knows the name, address and phone number of the emergency contact person.
- Include written instructions in your emergency kit for how to turn off electricity, gas, and water authorities advise you to do so. Teach adult family members how to shut off utilities. Teach children how to call 911, police and fire, and which radio station to tune to for emergency management.
- Give serious consideration to purchasing flood insurance. Keep insurance policies and contact information where you can find it in a hurry and take it with you. Keep an up to date inventory of household contents and prized possessions, including brand and model descriptions, serial numbers, purchase prices, etc.
- Prepare an inventory of household items, including valuables, vital records and irreplaceable keepsakes you will want to take with you.
- Safeguard Important Papers. Among the papers you may want to store at home in a water-proof, fire-proof locked box or take with you are:
 - Family advisors' names and addresses
 - Educational, employment and health records
 - Copies of birth and marriage certificates, insurance policies, investment records
 - Driver license numbers, income tax returns, current bank balances, loan payment books
 - Guarantees and warranties, appliance manuals, rental property records

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- Household inventory, safe-deposit records, copy of a list of valuable papers and their locations.
- Other important documents you may want to store in a safe-deposit box include:
 - Property records, deeds, titles and/or leases
 - Copies of wills, birth/death and marriage certificates, divorce decrees, adoption or custody papers, citizenship papers, passports, military service records
 - Lists of insurance policies, automobile bills of sale and titles, social security cards
 - Government savings bonds, religious records, retirement papers, copyrights and patents
- Household inventory (and/or videotape of home contents).

As a last resort, store important papers in sealed plastic bags in a secure area. Double bagging may further reduce the risk of water damage.

When a Flood Threatens

When a "Flood Watch" is issued:

- Listen to local radio or TV stations for weather information, advisories, and advice.
- Bring outdoor belongings, such as patio furniture, garbage cans, potted plants, etc., indoors.
- Move furniture and valuables to higher floors or elevate them as best you can. If you can't elevate furniture, place baggies around their legs.
- Top off your car's gas tank, in case an evacuation notice is issued or you decide to leave. (Don't expect to be able to purchase gas at the last minute)
- Fill bathtubs, sinks and jugs with clean water in case water becomes contaminated. Consult your home improvement store about ways to plug the drains of your tubs and sinks so they won't allow water to escape or become contaminated if water backs up in pipes.

When a "Flood Warning" is issued:

- Continue to monitor local TV and radio stations for storm developments.
- Be alert to signs of flooding and be ready to evacuate on a moment's notice.
- If it looks like evacuation will become necessary collect your emergency kit items.
- If instructed by authorities, turn off all utilities at the main power switch and in the house and close the main gas valve.
- Join with neighbors and volunteers to put sandbags or other protection in place.
- Listen for evacuation instructions. Follow recommended evacuation routes - shortcuts may be blocked.
- Do not drive over flooded roads (you may not be able to see abrupt drop offs in water depths and/or your vehicle could float into trouble). If your car stalls out escape to high ground immediately unless it is too dangerous to do so. As a last resort escape to the top of the vehicle and wait for assistance.

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Returning to a Flood Damaged Home Can Be Dangerous

Be wary of downed power lines in floodwaters. In addition, floodwaters can turn your house into one gigantic live wire. In extreme cases, just touching the house could cause electrocution.

Shorted out wires may not be the only safety problem you encounter. Gas leaks, slippery mud covered floors and stairs, and loose water soaked ceilings/plaster are common booby traps.

Some important safety tips:

- Take your time...fatigue and impatience can put you at risk
- Check for structural damage to see if it is safe to enter
- Don't enter the flooded house until you are sure the main electrical service is disconnected and cannot be turned on. Don't cross damp floors to shut off power at the fuse box
- Gas should be turned off outside, preferably by the utility company
- Gas lines should be turned off at the tank or meter... and let the house air out to remove gas fumes...and don't smoke or use any open flames that might cause an explosion
- Be careful of slippery surfaces...falls are a common post-disaster hazard
- Be alert for snakes, insects, and other animals that have been displaced and have chosen your house for higher ground.

Safely Cleaning a Flood-Damaged Home

Remove all water as soon as possible from your home. Also remove carpeting and other furnishings that are water soaked. Once water is removed, begin removing moisture that has been absorbed by wood and other materials. Consider using fans and dehumidifiers to speed the drying process. Shut windows and doors if you use dehumidifiers. If you experienced severe flooding, consider hiring a professional water removal contractor.

Avoid Health Risks

During flood cleanup, the indoor air quality in your home or office may appear to be the least of your problems. However, failure to remove contaminated materials and to reduce moisture and humidity can present serious long-term health risks. Standing water and wet materials are a breeding ground for microorganisms, such as viruses, bacteria and mold. They can cause disease, trigger allergic reactions, and continue to damage materials after the flood. Throw away anything that was wet with flood water and can't be cleaned. Purchase and use an N-95 respirator and goggles if you are exposed to flood conditions for any length of time. For more information contact the Environmental Protection Agency at www.epa.gov/iaq/flood (1-800-438-4318) or the Center for Disease Control at www.bt.cdc.gov/floods.