

Flood Safety Tips

A building that has been damaged by rising water can be a dangerous place. This information will help you know what to look out for and how to protect yourself and your family. It will also tell you what you need to know about cleaning up and making your home safe to live in again.

Watch out for these dangers:

Never assume that a water-damaged house is safe. Going into a building that has been flooded, even after the water is gone, can present a wide variety of hazards that can cause injury, illness or even death. **Do not allow children in the home** after the flood or while it is being cleaned, inspected or repaired.

- **Electrical hazards** – **Do not enter** a flooded or wet building if the power is on. If any electrical circuits have gotten wet, get the power turned off at the main breaker or fuse box and leave it off until the electrical wiring or equipment has been inspected and repaired by a licensed electrician and approved by your county building inspector.
- **Structural damage** – **Do not enter** a building if the framing or foundation is damaged. Look carefully before you enter. Leave immediately if shifting or unusual noises signal a possible collapse of the building. Contact your local building inspector for a safety inspection.
- **Hazardous materials** – Dangerous materials that might be found in flooded homes include pesticides, fuel oil, gasoline, chemicals and other substances that might have been brought in or spilled by the flood. Damaged buildings may also contain asbestos and lead-based paint, which can cause health problems during cleanup. Practically any building material that is not obviously solid wood, metal or glass could contain asbestos. Lead-based paint can be found pre-1978 housing and is still used in commercial and industrial buildings.
- **Injuries** – Falling objects, broken or damaged building components and slick surfaces can cause injuries, broken bones, and cuts. Lifting heavy objects can cause back and muscle strains.
- **Biological hazards** – Bacteria, viruses, molds and mildew can cause illness when you breathe them in or take them into your body through your mouth or through a cut in the skin. Bacteria or viruses may be left indoors by

floodwater, while mold and mildew may grow indoors after the floodwater has receded.

Flood Watches and Warnings

- **Flood forecasts** mean rainfall is heavy enough to cause rivers to overflow their banks.
- **Flood warnings** describe the affected river, lake or tidewater, the severity of the flooding, and when and where the flooding will begin.
- **Flash flood watches** mean heavy rains or snowmelt is occurring or expected to occur that may cause sudden flash flooding in specified areas. Be alert, you may be asked to take immediate action.
- **Flash flood warnings** are announced when flash flooding is occurring or is imminent along certain streams and designated areas. Immediate action to reach a place of safety must be taken by those threatened.
- Flood currents can be strong and hazardous. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA, keeps a round-the-clock surveillance on the nation's rivers and is prepared to issue warnings when the threat of flooding occurs. If you live in a flood zone, you may prevent loss if you make advance preparations.
- Weather Radio
- The National Weather Service issues flood warnings and flash flood watches to the public through the NOAA weather radio, commercial radio and television stations, and through local emergency agencies.
- The warning message tells the expected degree of flooding, when and where flooding will begin and the expected maximum river level at specific forecast points during flood crest.

Flood Safety Tips

Be aware of what could happen if dams in your area fail.

- Do not try to swim or dive into the water.
- Do not canoe or kayak on flooding rivers. Currents are deadly.
- Never try to cross a flowing stream on foot, not even a small stream. Streams or drainage channels may flood suddenly.



- Watch for mudslides, broken sewers or water mains, downed electrical wires and fallen objects.
- Stay away from areas that are already flooded.
- Learn evacuation routes and shelter locations.
- Listen to radio and television for information or instructions from local emergency managers.

Do Not Drive in Flood Waters

Do not drive your car through flood waters. Most deaths in flash flooding occur in automobiles. Cars will float in less than one foot of water, and that's when lives are seriously endangered.

If flooding occurs:

- Move to higher ground to escape floodwaters.
- **Do not** drive your vehicle over bridges, dips in the road, or low spots.
- Vehicles caught in rising water should be abandoned quickly.
- If you cannot see the line markings on the road, **do not** go through the water.
- Be especially cautious at night when it is harder to recognize the dangers of floods and flash floods.
- Do not stay in areas subject to flooding when water begins rising.

