

Overland flood notification

Alberta Environment monitors weather patterns, precipitation and provincial water levels and flows. They provide comprehensive public advisories about potential flooding.

These public advisories include river stage-up advisories, ice-jam warnings, high streamflow advisories, flood watches and flood warnings.

- A High Streamflow Advisory means that stream levels are rising or expected to rise rapidly and no major flooding is expected. Minor flooding in low-lying areas is possible. Anyone situated close to the affected streams (campers, fishermen, boaters and the general public) is advised to use caution.
- A Flood Watch means that stream levels are rising and will approach or exceed the bank. Flooding of areas adjacent to these streams may occur. Anyone situated close to the streams is advised to take appropriate precautionary measures.
- A Flood Warning means that rising river levels will result in flooding of areas adjacent to the affected streams. Anyone situated close to the river should take appropriate measures to avoid flood damage.

Municipal governments are responsible for informing their residents about possible flooding and providing detailed information about what to do to protect their families and property. This information is often provided through local newspapers, and radio and television stations.

For more information on hazards in Alberta, contact your municipality's Director of Emergency Management or the Alberta Emergency Management Agency at 780-422-9000 (Dial 310-0000 for toll-free access outside Edmonton) or visit www.aema.alberta.ca

Protecting your family during a flood

Floods can have a big impact on Albertans. You and your family can minimize your loss in a flood situation. Information is your best defence when emergencies occur. Contact your local Director of Emergency Management or municipal government office to find out what emergency or disaster events could occur in your area. Ask what you should do to prepare.

The most important thing to do when considering any emergency is to develop an emergency plan. Learn more about your flood risks and incorporate that into your plan.

Create a flood plan

- Know the warning systems your municipal government uses. Make sure you know what the signals mean, how they will be used, and what you should do when you hear it.
- Develop a family emergency plan. Include arrangements for family members with special needs in your plan (disabled and elderly who use special medical equipment).
- Make arrangements for your family pet(s) when planning. Contact your local emergency management office or your veterinarian for information.
- Plan how your family will stay in contact if separated during a disaster or emergency. Pick two meeting places. One location that is a safe distance from your home. The second place should be outside your neighbourhood in case you cannot return home.
- Choose a relative or friend who lives outside your municipality, as a check-in contact for everyone to call.
- Post emergency telephone numbers by every phone in your home.
- Teach children to call fire, police and emergency medical services and which local radio station to tune into for emergency information.
- Prepare an emergency kit for the home and each vehicle. Maintain the kits, replenish supplies, and make sure everyone knows where they are stored.
- Show family members how and when to shut off water, gas and electricity at the main switches.
- Learn your community's evacuation routes; some hazards may force you to leave your home.
- Learn first aid and CPR.
- Meet with your neighbours and plan how you would work together in a disaster. Include neighbours with special needs in your planning. Contact your municipal administration to ensure that your plan is consistent with municipal actions.

Prepare to evacuate

- Prepare a list of family members' prescribed medications including generic names and prescribed dosage. Include the name and telephone numbers of your doctors. For those who rely on medical devices such as a pacemaker, list the style, serial number, and other pertinent information. Carry it with you at all times.
- Collect all vital family records and other irreplaceable items in one central location where they can easily be transported if you must leave the area quickly. Keep them in a waterproof and fireproof container.
- Ensure that you have a portable solar, hand wind-up, or battery-operated radio and spare batteries. Listen to the radio for flood advisories and warnings and follow instructions from your local government.
- Have a full tank of fuel in your vehicle. An electrical outage due to flooding may shut down service station pumps. If you don't have personal transportation, make alternative arrangements with a neighbour.
- Stock up on food that requires little or no cooking or refrigeration. Gather emergency lighting and cooking supplies like flashlights, candles, camp stoves, spare batteries, fuel and waterproof

matches. Ensure fuel is stored and handled properly. Keep this gear operational and within easy reach.

- Know how to use the manual override of your garage door. Have an emergency key release if your garage door is the only access and exit to your home. Perform a manual operation safety test regularly.
- Store water in clean containers. The water supply may be contaminated before it becomes necessary to evacuate.
- Decide what basic supplies your family requires and stock up immediately. Pack supplies in waterproof containers or plastic garbage bags. Essentials include:
 - Warm clothing and waterproof rubber boots
 - Rain coats
 - Blankets or sleeping bags in sealed plastic bags
 - Prescription medicines and first-aid supplies
 - Personal identification for each family member (name tags and wallet cards)
 - Towels, soap, personal hygiene and toiletry items

How can we protect our home in case of a flood?

- Know where to obtain sandbags, plywood, plastic sheeting and lumber
- Remove as many household items you can. If this is not possible, move possessions from the basement to an upper floor.
- Seal hazardous materials such as weed killers and insecticides in plastic garbage bags and move them into safe storage or dispose of them safely.

Electrical appliances

- At the first warning of a flood, turn off electrical power and leave it off. If the basement is already wet, be cautious. If you are confident that you can do it safely, stand on a dry wooden chair or box and use a dry board or stick to turn off the main switch.
- Water usually ruins electrical motors. Move all portable electric heaters, power tools and electrical appliances to a safe place.
- If this isn't possible, and if qualified to do so, consider removing the motors, controls and switches from furnaces, refrigerators and washers.
- If you can, consider moving all thermally insulated appliances such as freezers and refrigerators to upper floors of the house. This precaution should save you the expense of replacing them.

Gas-fired appliances

- At the first warning of flooding, turn off all gas-fired appliances and put out the pilot light. Turn off the gas inlet valve to your home, which is located at the gas meter. This will prevent gas from escaping when the inlet valve is re-opened.
- Do not remove any gas-fired appliances without ensuring that the main gas inlet valve has been closed.
- There should be no smoking or open flames of any kind in the area. To avoid causing sparks, use a flashlight taped in the "on" position.
- For a forced air furnace, move the fan motor and fan to a dry storage place.
- Do not drain the hot water tank — it will serve as ballast to secure the tank in place.
- If gas appliances are removed, the gas outlets should be made tight using a plugged valve, a cap, or a plug on the piping system.

Plumbing

- Remove any basement toilet bowls. Plug these outlets and all other basement outlets (floor drains, sinks, laundry drains) to prevent floodwater from entering.
- Use wooden plugs or beanbags and secure these outlets with plank braces nailed securely to floor joists.

Fuel tanks

- Anchor propane tanks to keep them from moving, even if they are full.
- Turn off the tank valve.
- Disconnect the tubing and seal the end.
- Secure the tank with heavy rope or chain, something heavy enough to resist the force of floodwaters.

What to do during a flood

- Listen to your radio. Important instructions for your safety and information on the situation will be broadcasted.
- If you are requested to leave the area, do so immediately and follow instructions issued by your municipal officials.
- Remember your neighbours, particularly the elderly. They may need your help or the assistance of municipal emergency services.
- Stay out of the flooded area until the municipal authority gives permission to return.
- Barricades are placed on roads for your protection. If you encounter a barricade, go another way.
- Avoid standing water. It may be electrically charged from ground or downed power lines.
- Do not attempt to drive over a flooded road. You could be stranded. Floodwaters can conceal debris or areas where the road has eroded. The ground underneath will probably be slippery.
- Watch for damaged roads, loose or downed wires and fallen objects on the road.
- Do not drive through water unless you are certain the road is safe and the water is no higher than the wheels of your vehicle. Proceed slowly to avoid splashing water on the engine and stalling it. When emerging from water, drive carefully because wet brakes do not work well.
- If your car stalls in rising waters, get out immediately and make your way to higher ground.
- Do not attempt to cross a flowing stream. You can be swept off your feet by only 15 centimetres (six inches) of moving water.
- Whether in a car or on foot, avoid areas prone to flash flooding.
- Do not phone the emergency management office, police or fire department unless you need help or are calling on behalf of others requiring assistance. Your radio will keep you informed.
- Do not attempt search and rescue operations on your own.

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Flood-proofing your home

Municipal governments prevent flooding by maintaining the sewage systems. If you experience drainage problems at your home, ensure that the source of flooding is not on your property. Take steps to flood-proof your home.

What is a sanitary sewer?

A sanitary sewer is a pipe located in the street and designed to transport wastewater from your home. This consists of water from sanitary fixtures and floor drains inside your house as well as groundwater from weeping tiles around the foundation of your home.

What is a storm sewer?

A storm sewer is a pipe, located in the street, which is designed to carry storm-related water runoff. Storm sewers are normally much larger than sanitary sewers because they are designed to carry much larger amounts of flow.

What causes sewer backup?

- Extra storm-related water from sources other than wastewater and groundwater should flow into the storm sewer or soak into the ground without entering the sanitary sewer.
- If excess storm water does enter the sanitary sewer system, it causes a supercharged sewer flow. An eight-inch (20 centimetres) sanitary sewer can handle wastewater from up to 500 homes; however, it takes only a few unexpected water sources to overload this kind of system.

How can a supercharged sanitary sewer cause basement flooding?

A supercharged sewer flows at a greater than normal level. Basement flooding can occur if the home has sanitary fixtures or floor drains below the supercharged level.

Downspouts and roof drainage

- Most homes are equipped with downspouts which discharge the water collected by eaves troughs directly into the ground. Excess water runs into the front street where it enters the storm sewer. It is very important that this water does not enter the sanitary sewer. If your downspout drains too close to the side of your house, this water can drain into the sanitary sewer through the weeping tile adjacent to your house foundation.
- Damage or sanitary sewer surcharging can occur if rainwater drains too close to your house on ground that may not be tightly compacted. The excavation for your basement may have been dug a few feet wider on all sides to allow working room during construction of the basement walls. When this extra space was backfilled, the soil may not have been tamped down as tightly as the original soil, making it more likely to settle and trap surface water.
- Surface water soaking down to your foundation can create problems: it can damage your foundation; seep through cracks in your basement wall, causing dampness; or overload the sanitary sewer by draining through weeping tiles, causing a sewer backup.

What can I do to prevent flooding in my home?

You may be able to do some “flood-proofing” tasks yourself, while other changes need a qualified contractor or tradesman.

- Fill in any settlement next to your house.
- Redirect storm water away from your house.
- Make sure the ground slopes away from your house on all sides.
- Always keep your downspout extension in place.
- Check to see that your downspout extension drains a good distance away from your house in an area that will not erode.
- Be careful that water does not drain into your neighbour’s property.
- If your downspout is connected to the weeping tile adjacent to your home, disconnect it immediately.
- If you are constructing a new home and plan to build on a slab, or install a washroom in the basement, consider taking the necessary precautions to prevent sewage and water from backing up into your house through the sanitary drains.
- One aspect of flood protection involves the installation of backflow valves on toilets, floor drains, washing machine drains, rain downspouts, sump pumps and any sink drains in the basement. Main sewer lines and septic connections should also be considered. These are designed to prevent sewage and water from backing up through these waste lines. Some backflow valves operate automatically while others may have to be closed by hand. In most cases the backflow valves may need to be installed by a qualified plumber or contractor according to existing building codes.

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After the flood

After a flood, your municipal government will notify the public through the media when it is safe to return home. The following are some important tips to help you clean up and restore your property. If you require more specific information on cleanup, contact your municipal office or your local health unit. Let your insurance agent or broker know as soon as possible about any loss or damage. If you are a tenant, inform your landlord about any flood damage to the property.

Protecting your emotional health

A flood disaster is both mentally and physically stressful. Take steps so that you and your family maintain their health:

- Rest often and eat properly
- Make a list of jobs that need to be done and do them in the order of priority, one at a time
- Talk to others about your concerns and don't be afraid to ask for help
- Check your newspaper and listen to your local radio or television stations for information and help from your municipal government and/or Alberta Health Services on coping with the emotional effects of a disaster.

Protecting yourself and your family

- Floodwater may be contaminated with sewage and other contaminants, and could pose a health hazard. Proper clean-up is essential. Contact your local health unit if you suspect sewage contamination. Be sure to comply with their recommendations about using respirators, special clothing, or other protective measures. Do not try to save carpets, clothing or bedding that have been exposed to sewage. Sewage-contaminated waste materials should be placed in heavy-duty garbage bags and tagged. Follow your municipality's instructions for disposal.
- Do not allow children into the house or yard until everything has been cleaned and disinfected. If children must be present during clean up, supervise them closely.
- Wear rubber boots, rubber gloves and eye protectors to prevent injuries.
- Be vigilant about good personal hygiene, i.e., wash face and hands with soap before eating or drinking.
- Check your newspaper and listen to your local radio or television stations for information about help that may be provided by your municipal or the provincial government, Alberta Health Services or other agencies.
- Prompt action will help to prevent mould. Try to get all wet surfaces clean, disinfected and dry as soon as possible.
- Cleanup priorities include:
 - Removing water as soon as possible
 - Clean out mud and other debris
 - Discarding all materials that cannot be saved. Place them in a bag and dispose of them according to municipal regulations
 - Wash and rinse all fabrics and furniture that will be sent out for cleaning, then dry and take them to the cleaners as soon as possible
 - Wash and rinse all surfaces, then disinfect them

Returning home

As soon as floodwaters have receded and you have been notified that the flood danger is over, you will want to return to your house and start cleaning up. Do not attempt to live in the house, however, until you take the following precautions:

- Have the electric power system checked by an electrician.
- Have natural gas and propane appliances checked by a gas fitter.
- The water supply has been declared safe for drinking.
- Your sanitation facilities are working.
- All flood-contaminated rooms have been cleaned and disinfected.

Entering your home

- Make sure the building is safe before entering. Check for foundation damage and make sure all porch roofs and overhangs have their supports intact. If you see damage, contact a building inspector.
- If you see downed power lines or smell gas, leave the building and contact your utility company.
- If your basement was flooded, do not switch on the electricity until the complete system has been checked by a qualified electrician.
- Be very careful when you enter the building. A door sticking at the top could mean that the ceiling is ready to fall. If you have to force the door open, make sure you stand outside, well clear of any falling debris.
- Look for wet plaster on the ceiling. Knock it down with a stick before moving around.
- Use a flashlight to inspect for damage inside the house. Do not strike a match or use an open flame unless you know the gas has been turned off and the area has been ventilated.
- Watch your step. The floors and stairs can be very slippery, and silt on a basement floor may conceal nails or broken glass.
- Open all doors and windows to dry out the building.

Starting the clean-up

- Pump out the basement when it is safe to do so. If water has been standing for some time, is visibly cloudy, and/or has a foul smell, it is likely polluted and requires urgent treatment and removal. Pumps, wet/dry vacuums, and dehumidifiers may be available to rent. To hire a professional service, look in the telephone directory Yellow Pages under "Water Damage Restoration Services."
- Move your belongings out of the wet area. Clean them and then spread them out to dry.
- If your home was flooded by sewage, discard exposed carpets, clothing, bedding and stuffed toys. Place these items and any other items you do not want to keep in heavy-duty garbage bags for disposal.
- Remove all mud and debris by scraping and washing with detergent, using a stiff broom or brush. This may be contaminated material and may need to be properly disposed of. Follow your municipality's instructions for disposal.
- Never leave waste on the ground where children are at risk and insects or animals could pick up disease-causing organisms.
- Disinfect all walls, floors, ceilings and fixtures after they have dried. Make your own disinfecting solution by adding 125 millilitres (a half cup) of household bleach to 9 litres (2 gallons) of water or use a commercial disinfectant according to directions. Rinse metals after washing with a chlorine solution to prevent corrosion. Coat cast-iron items with vegetable oil to prevent rusting.
- DO NOT use gas-powered generators, camping stoves or charcoal barbecues indoors. The fumes are hazardous indoors.
- Water must be boiled or chlorinated before use until flooded and contaminated wells, cisterns, dugouts and dams have been treated and water samples analyzed as safe by your health unit.

Cisterns

Cisterns must be emptied, thoroughly cleaned, and refilled with chlorinated water. The following procedure should be used to get a cistern back into service:

- Remove all mud, cleaning the cistern thoroughly with broom or brush.
- Disinfect with a concentrated solution of chlorine bleach: 450 millilitres (2 cups) to 450 litres (100 gallons) of water.
- Pump a thoroughly mixed, concentrate solution of chlorine bleach through the system. Then close all outlets and allow the solution to remain in the system for eight hours.
- Thoroughly rinse the whole system with disinfected water. The odour of chlorine must disappear completely. This step is essential because chlorine can corrode metal pipes and tanks.

Dugouts and dams

Follow this procedure to put a dugout back in service:

- Pump out and remove sludge and debris.
- Make any repairs required.
- Refill the dugout.
- Consider installing a continuous chlorination-filtration system. Technical advice and information may be obtained from your Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development district office.

Plumbing

- During a flood, the water pressure in plumbing lines can reverse, and water in hot and cold pipes can be contaminated with floodwater. Have a plumber inject bleach into the lines to disinfect them.
- The footing drains outside your foundations may have been overloaded or blocked during the flooding. Have them checked by someone trained in plumbing and drains.
- Floor drains may be partially or fully blocked because of the flooding. Carefully flush, clean and disinfect floor drains and sump pumps.

Wells

Wells must be thoroughly pumped out and inflow water chlorinated. This procedure should not be attempted on shallow wells until at least two weeks after floodwaters have receded. Otherwise, they may be re-contaminated by polluted ground water.

Use the following procedure for getting a well back into service:

- Pump out the well.
- Thoroughly clean bored or dug wells. Remove floating debris and scrub or hose foreign material from well cribbing or casing. Then pump the well until water is clear.
- Pump 900 litres (200 gallons) of water into clean storage near the well.
- Pour 9 litres (2 gallons) of household laundry bleach (5.25 per cent chlorine) into well. You can get an equivalent strength of chlorine by substituting 4.5 litres (1 gallon) sodium hypochlorite (12 per cent chlorine) or 0.6 kilograms (22 ounces) by weight of calcium hypochlorite (70 per cent chlorine.)
- Allow water to return to the non-pumping level in the well.
- Mix 9 litres (2 gallons) of household laundry bleach into the 900 litres (200 gallons) of water stored near the well and siphon the mixture into the well.
- Open each hydrant, faucet and other outlet in the distribution system and let it run until water at the outlet has a chlorine odour.
- Allow chlorine mixture to stand in the entire distribution system at least eight hours, preferably overnight.
- After the chlorine mixture has been in the system for at least eight hours, open an outside tap and let the mixture run onto the ground surface until all chlorine odour has disappeared. In high capacity

wells it may be necessary to add enough clean water to the well during pumping to displace the water stored above the pump intake. Backwash all filters and softeners and flush the hot water tank.

- If the wastewater has a chlorine odour and you have difficulty removing the chlorine from the well, it indicates that too much chlorine was used. When the correct quantity of chlorine is used, the wastewater will have a chlorine odour, but the odour will disappear after the well has been pumped continuously for two to three hours.
- Don't pump the wastewater into the septic tank. It will impair operation and cause flooding.
- After you have followed these procedures, obtain a sterile water-testing bottle from your local health unit and return a well water sample for analysis. Do not use the well water without first disinfecting it and until you have been notified that the water sample is safe.

Restoring your sewage system

A house should not be re-occupied until satisfactory toilet facilities have been restored. Solid or liquid wastes must never be deposited on the ground where insects and animals can pick up and spread disease-causing organisms.

Insect control

For advice on insect control, contact your local health unit or a professional pest control company.

Municipal sewers

Householders will be notified when the municipal sewage system has been restored.

Outhouses (pit privies)

- Ensure that the outhouse is securely over the pit.
- If water remains in the pit, add ½ litre (2 cups) of household laundry bleach or 0.45 kilogram (1 lb.) of chloride or lime every week until the water disappears.
- If the outhouse has been washed away, cover open pits to prevent accidents and the spread of disease, until it can be replaced.

Septic tanks

- Septic tanks won't operate until the disposal (leaching) field has dried. Check the siphon/pumping chamber (second compartment) to ensure that the intake of the siphon or pump is not blocked.
- NEVER enter a septic tank to check out a pump or siphon system without being protected by a certified air pack and a safety harness with rope. The atmosphere in a septic tank can be lethal, causing death without the use of proper safety equipment. At least one observer must be present when anyone enters a septic tank. This is for safety reasons and for quick removal of a person from the tank if anything should happen to cause a dangerous situation.

Yard clean-up

- Follow your municipality's instructions for disposal of contaminated and other materials.
- Locate garbage for collection by municipal services at a safe distance from the home and downgrade of a well.
- Make sure that materials, which attract insects or animals, are sealed in animal-proof containers.

Restoring your heating system

- Before starting up the heating system, protect yourself against the hazards of fire, suffocation and explosion. Be careful to take all precautions to ensure the heating system is safe before resuming use. Have it inspected by a qualified technician.
- Before lighting the furnace, examine the inside of the combustion chamber and clean it thoroughly.
- Wash sediment from all pipes and ducts with a hose or a swab on a long stick. Access can usually be made through the clean-out door above the fire door. If the heater has a jacket, clean between the heater and the outside casing.
- Ensure that the chimney isn't plugged. Take the smoke pipe out of the chimney and remove any mud from the lower part of the chimney.
- Have the heating system checked by a qualified technician before using it again.

Duct work

Hire a contractor to clean and inspect ductwork.

Gas furnaces/appliances

- Do not touch any electrical fixtures or switches. If the odour of gas is present, leave the building immediately, leaving the doors open. Contact the gas utility company. Do not re-enter the building until the leak has been repaired.
- When it is safe to clean gas appliances:
 - Disconnect the vent connectors from appliances and clean thoroughly.
 - Open the clean-out door at the base of the chimney and clean it thoroughly, removing mud and debris.
- Remove and clean any fan assemblies that have gotten wet. If any electric motor has been wet, have it checked by an electrician. It may be dangerous to use.
- Do not touch any gas controls or attempt to reconnect gas appliances. The system must be checked by a licensed gasfitter before being put back into service.
- Have propane systems checked by a licensed gasfitter before turning them on.

Water heaters

Water heaters are insulated with glass fibre, which can become soggy and saturated under its cover if flooded. If the appliance can be repaired, have the insulation replaced, as it is contaminated by the floodwaters.

Restoring electrical appliances

- If the electrical panel was submerged, have a qualified electrician replace all circuit breakers.
- All electrical appliances that got wet by the floodwaters should be checked by an electrician before being used.
- Depending on the depth of water in which the appliance was submerged, it may be less costly to replace rather than repair appliances.
- Appliances with foam insulation, such as ovens, refrigerators, and freezers that were submerged in floodwater, may have to be discarded because they cannot be disinfected. Check with an experienced serviceworker as to whether or not it is possible to remove and replace the insulation.
- All lighting fixtures, which were submerged in water, should be removed, cleaned and dried, and checked. Clean outlet boxes, wiring and sockets but do not remove connections or disconnect wiring. Connections in wiring and lights and small appliances can be wet and soggy even after the cover tape looks dry. Be sure they are dry before using. If you have any doubt about appliances or wiring, contact your electrician.

MAKE SURE THE POWER SUPPLY IS TURNED OFF BEFORE WORKING ON OUTLETS / FIXTURES.

- Floor and table lamps should be completely disassembled, cleaned and dried thoroughly, before using.
- Extension cords that are not in good condition should be discarded.

Disinfectants

- Household liquid chlorine bleach (5 per cent sodium hypochlorite solution) is an effective disinfectant for most bacteria and fungi (like mold). Use bleach carefully and be sure you have cross ventilation.
- Surfaces and structures with mold growth - use full strength household bleach and let it remain on the surface for 15 minutes.
- For surfaces (not cement), structures, dishes, cutlery and utensils where no mold is visible - use one (1) part bleach to three (3) parts water.
- Bleach can destroy organic fabrics so do not use on silk and wool items. It can also weaken cotton fibres so use with care.
- Bleach can affect the colours of many surfaces and materials. Test on a small area before using.
- Never mix bleach with ammonia. The fumes produced together are very toxic.
- For wooden surfaces which could be damaged by a bleach solution - use a 5 to 10 percent borax solution with dishwashing detergent. Then next day wash with a one (1) part vinegar to three (3) part water solution and then rinse.

Foods

Floodwaters carry disease from raw sewage. The only safe flood-exposed foods are those in sealed metal cans, and even then, only if cans have not been dented. Use the following procedures with foods:

- Thoroughly clean all undamaged cans before opening. Use a brush to clean around the rims and caps. Disinfect, rinse and dry before storing.
- Dispose of the following items:
 - The contents of your freezer or refrigerator, if electricity has been interrupted and contents thawed, or if appliances have been exposed to flood waters.
 - All exposed meats
 - All exposed fresh fruits and vegetables
 - All exposed boxed foods
 - All products in jars, including home preserves, cans and bottles that have been under water. The area under the seal of a jar or bottle cannot be adequately disinfected
 - Products in coolers, if the coolers have been without power for four (4) hours
 - All exposed medicines, cosmetics and other personal care items
- If in doubt about any items, contact your local health unit.

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