

Coming Home: Steps to Stay Safe as You Return Home

**Prepare for your return: Bring the right supplies and drive carefully.
Do a home safety inspection and make a cleanup plan.
Know common cleanup dangers and be aware of other dangers.**

Prepare for your return

- Go home only after authorities say it is safe.
- Call the power and gas company to find out if services are available in your area.
- Let family or friends know you are returning home.
- Make sure you have had a tetanus shot in the past 10 years.

Drive carefully

- Do not drive through floodwaters or over downed power lines.
- Traffic lights may be out, and street signs may be turned or gone.
- Stop at all intersections, and have a full tank of gas.

Bring the right supplies — check them off

- Lots of bottled drinking water and some sports drinks
- Food that does not have to be kept cold
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- First-aid kit
- Battery-operated radio
- Waterproof boots or waders
- Safety gear: work gloves, safety goggles, a hard hat and hard-soled boots or shoes
- N-95 face masks (available at hardware stores)
- Camera or video camera to record damage
- Hand tools: hammer, saw, screwdriver, crowbar, crescent wrench, pliers, etc.
- Trash bags and cleaning supplies
- Cell phone

Do a home safety inspection

- Do not enter your house if it is damaged extensively or if you think it may fall down.
- If water surrounds your house, do not enter it.
- Check outside for loose power lines and gas leaks; call the power company if you find any before entering.
- Turn off the power before entering a flooded home or building. Do not turn off the power if you are standing in water.
- Proceed carefully. Floors may be slippery or have holes, ceilings and tall furniture may fall.
- Open all doors and windows as soon as you enter the structure, then exit the building and do not reenter until it has aired out for 30 minutes.
- Check for broken water pipes.
- Have a reputable contractor inspect your roof.
- Check trees for broken branches and leaning trunks.

Make a cleanup plan

- Contact your insurance agent and mortgage lender.
- Photograph or videotape the damage to your home.
- Plan to do only what you can safely do.
- Hire professionals to repair roof, wiring, walls, and appliances and to cut down damaged trees.

Cleanup Dangers

Electrical dangers

- Be sure the main electric power and all circuit breakers are off.
- Have the electrical wiring inspected before turning on the main power.
- Clean and dry appliances before turning them on.
- Do not use electrical tools or appliances while standing in water.

Carbon monoxide (CO)

- CO is an odorless, colorless gas that can kill you within minutes.
- Never use generators, pressure washers, or other gas-powered tools inside your home.
- Keep generators and other engines outside and away from windows and vents.
- Have the gas company turn on the gas — do not do it yourself.
- Know the signs of CO poisoning: headache, fatigue, nausea, dizziness, vomiting, loss of consciousness.

Falls

- Falls from ladders and roofs can cause broken bones and death.
- Put ladders on flat, solid ground and have a helper hold the base.
- Do not stand on the top two rungs.
- Use a ladder that reaches at least three feet above the roof edge.
- Be careful on your roof — shingles and plastic sheeting can be very slippery.

Chainsaws

- Chainsaws are very dangerous.
- Use a hand saw for small jobs.
- Wear cut-proof chainsaw pants, gloves, and goggles/face shield.
- Hold the chainsaw with two hands.
- Do not cut with the tip of the chainsaw.
- Never cut above chest height or while on a ladder.
- Hire a tree trimmer to cut down large branches and trees.

Cleaning products

- Always wear rubber gloves and boots while using cleaning products.
- Never mix bleach and ammonia or other cleaning products.
- If you splash cleaning product on your skin or eyes, rinse with plenty of bottled water.

Mold

- A mold problem can usually be seen or smelled.
- Mold growth may often appear as slightly furry, discolored, or slimy patches that increase in size as they grow.
- To find mold, it may be necessary to look behind and underneath surfaces, such as carpets, wallpaper, cabinets, and walls.
- Mold can cause health effects in some people. The most common effects are allergic responses from breathing mold spores, however; some people can suffer from infections and toxic effects from mold exposure.

Mold Cleanup

- Wear an N-95 face mask when working around mold.
- Control the moisture problem by opening windows and using a de-humidifier.
- Porous materials with extensive mold growth should be discarded such as drywall, carpeting, paper, and ceiling tiles.
- All wet materials must be thoroughly dried. If that is not possible, items should be discarded.
- Mold growing on hard surfaces can be cleaned. Small areas can be scrubbed with a cleaning rag wetted with dilute detergent. For a large mold problem, an experienced professional should do the work.
- Continue to monitor the area for new mold growth and signs of moisture.

Other concerns

- Get help lifting heavy things to avoid back strains.
- Protect yourself from insects: Use products with DEET or Picaridin on skin and clothing.
- Deep cuts and puncture wounds may become infected. See a doctor!
- Drink plenty of bottled water and rest frequently.



Information for this fact sheet was developed by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). For additional information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/emres/flood.html>

<http://www.epa.gov/naturaldisasters/flooding.html><http://www.epa.gov/naturaldisasters/flooding.html>