

Returning After a Flood

A building that has been flooded can be a dangerous place. This information can help protect you and your family from the hazards of flooded buildings. It will also provide information 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, turn off the power 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 local 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 found in flooded homes may include pesticides, fuel oil, gasoline, chemicals and other substances that might have been brought in or spilled by floodwaters. 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 in pre-1978 housing and is still used in commercial and industrial buildings.
- **Animal- and insect-related hazards:** Look carefully before entering a building to determine if there are displaced animals inside, such as dogs, cats, raccoons and rodents. Watch out for snakes and insects, such as wasps, fire ants and mosquitoes.
- **Injuries:** Falling objects, broken or damaged building components, and slick surfaces can cause injuries, broken bones and cuts. Lifting heavy objects can cause back injuries and muscle strains.
- **Biological hazards:** Bacteria, viruses, fungi (mold and mildew) and other microorganisms can cause illness when you breathe them in, take them into your body through your mouth, or take them in through non-intact skin. Bacteria, viruses and other microorganisms may be left indoors by floodwater, while mold and mildew may grow indoors after the floodwater has receded.