

After the Disaster

After a disaster your first priority should be the safety and health of your family. If the disaster is a flood, there are many things you can do to protect your family from the hazards associated with flooding. Also watch out for signs of stress and fatigue. Do not try to do too much at once. Talk about the situation with others to release tension. Encourage your children to talk about their feelings. Keep the family together.

Stay away from floodwaters. Moving water only six inches deep can sweep you off your feet and can be contaminated by raw sewage, oil, or gasoline. You can also be exposed to electrical shocks from downed or underground power lines. Stay away from downed power lines and report them to the electric company. If you come in contact with floodwaters, wash your hands frequently with soap and clean water to protect you and your family's health.

If the water has receded, be aware that roads and bridges may have weakened and could collapse under the weight of an automobile. Continue to listen to your battery-operated radio for information on emergency relief efforts. You will be given information on where to go for shelter, food, and dry clothing. Throw away any food that has come in contact with floodwaters and listen to news reports to learn if your community's water supply is contaminated.

If you have been permitted to return to your damaged home after being evacuated or restricted from the area, you should:

- ✓ Put on sturdy boots and gloves before entering the area.
- ✓ Continue to monitor your battery-powered radio for emergency updates.
- ✓ Walk around the outside of your home and check for gas leaks, downed power lines, and structural damage before going inside. If you are uncertain about whether your house is safe, have your home inspected by a professional before entering.
- ✓ Look for cracks in the walls, foundation, chimney, and roof. Do not enter your home or any structure if it looks like the building may collapse. If the home was damaged by fire, do not enter until authorities say it is safe.
- ✓ Do not use a candle, gas or oil lantern for lighting. Leaking gas or other flammables may be present. Use a battery-powered flashlight instead. Do not smoke in the area.
- ✓ Check for gas leaks. Start at the hot water heater and check all appliances that use gas – gas dryer, gas cooking stove, gas home heating system, etc. If you smell gas, turn off the main gas valve and call the gas company from a neighbor's house. If you shut off the main gas valve you will need a professional to turn it back on.

- ✓ Check your electric wiring and outlets for sparks, broken or frayed wires, or if you smell hot insulation. Do not turn on any electrical item – appliances, lights, vacuum cleaners, etc. – until you are sure they are dried out and there is not danger of electrical shock. Unplug the appliances until they have been checked by a professional. Turn off the electricity at the main circuit breaker panel or fuse box if any problem exists. Do not touch any electrical item if you are wet or are standing in water.
- ✓ Watch for poisonous snakes and other harmful animals and use a stick to poke through debris.
- ✓ Check with local authorities before using any water, your water supply and/or well may be contaminated. If your water or sewage system appears damaged, turn off the main water valve. Boiling is the safest way to purify water.
- ✓ Clean up and dispose of spilled medicines, flammable liquids, bleaches, cosmetics, etc.
- ✓ Clean and disinfect everything that got wet. The flood waters probably contained sewage and chemicals.
- ✓ Contact your insurance agent to determine what coverage you have that will reimburse you for your loss.
- ✓ Take pictures or video of the damage to your home and belongings.
- ✓ Locate your important papers such as insurance policies, financial records, and personal records. Look for valuable items such as jewelry and family heirlooms.
- ✓ Try to protect your home from further damage. Open windows and doors to aid in drying out your home. Patch holes and repair broken glass.
- ✓ If you have a basement, pump the water out slowly to avoid further damage. If the water is pumped out too fast, walls may collapse and the floor may buckle if the surrounding ground is still water logged.
- ✓ Keep a detailed record of your cleanup costs; you may be reimbursed by the insurance company for the cleanup materials and labor.

Recovering from a natural disaster, such as a flood, can be very difficult and stressful. Tackling the job one step at a time can ease the pain and help you get your life back to normal as quickly as possible.