



# New York State Emergency Management Office

## Think Safety First

### Information on What to Do After a Flood

David A. Paterson, Governor

New York State and local government officials caution that recovering from a flood involves taking many special precautions, including the following:

#### **AFTER THE FLOOD: RETURNING HOME**

- Stay informed – listen to the radio or TV for instructions from local officials.
- Wait until an area has been declared safe before entering it. Be careful driving – roads may be damaged and power lines may be down.
- Stay away from downed power lines.
- Before entering a building, check for structural damage. Turn off any outside gas lines at the meter or tank. Let the building air out to remove foul odors or escaping gases.
- When entering the building, use a battery-powered flashlight. Do not use an open flame as a source of light. Gas may be trapped inside the structure.
- When inspecting the building, wear rubber boots and gloves. Watch for electrical shorts and live wires before making certain the main power switch is off.
- Do not turn on electrical appliances until an electrician has checked the system.
- If for any reason you have turned off natural gas service to your home, call your natural gas utility to restore service. Do not attempt to restore gas service yourself.
- Before you begin the cleanup process, document your damage. Safely take photos of all visible damage.
- When pumping out basements, make sure that gas and electric service are off before starting to pump. The draining should not be done all at once. Instead, drain a third at a time to make sure the pressure difference does not cause the walls to buckle or collapse.

#### **PREVENTING FOOD-BORNE DISEASES**

- Commercially canned food should be discarded if there is bulging or opened.
- Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if you remove the labels and then disinfect the cans in a bleach solution. Use 1/4 cup of bleach in one gallon of water; re-label the cans including expiration date and type of food.
- Infants should be fed only pre-mixed canned baby formula.
- Frozen and refrigerated foods can also be unsafe. Thawed and refrigerated foods should be thrown out after four hours.

#### **SANITATION & HYGIENE: PREVENTING ILLNESS**

- Basic hygiene is very important during this emergency period. Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected before eating and after toilet use, cleanup activities or handling items contaminated by floodwater or sewage.
- Floodwaters may contain fecal matter from sewage systems, agricultural and industrial waste and septic tanks. If you have open cuts or sores exposed to the floodwater, keep them as clean as possible by washing them with soap and disinfected or boiled water. Apply antibiotic ointment to reduce the risk of infection.
- Do not allow children to play in floodwater or with toys that are contaminated by floodwater.
- If floodwaters are covering your septic tank and leach field, you should not use any flush toilets attached to the system.

## **PREVENTING MOLD GROWTH**

- Moisture that enters buildings from leaks or flooding accelerates mold growth. Molds can cause disease, trigger allergic reactions and continue to damage materials after the storm.
- Remove standing water from your home or office. Remove wet materials promptly and ventilate; use fans and dehumidifiers if possible.
- If mold growth has already occurred, it is best to have a professional remove it.
- Individuals with known mold allergies or asthma should never clean or remove mold.
- Be careful about mixing household cleaners and disinfectants, as combining certain types of products can produce toxic fumes and result in injury or death.

## **ADDITIONAL HOUSEHOLD CLEANUP TIPS**

- Walls, hard-surfaced floors and many other household surfaces must be cleaned with soap and water and disinfected with a solution of 1 cup of bleach to five gallons of water.
- Thoroughly disinfect surfaces that are exposed to food and children's play areas.
- Wash all linens and clothing in hot water or dry-clean.
- Items that cannot be washed or dry-cleaned, such as mattresses and upholstered furniture, must be air dried in the sun and sprayed thoroughly with a disinfectant.
- Steam-clean all carpeting.
- Replace fiberboard, insulation and disposable filters in your heating/cooling system.
- Wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup.
- It can be difficult to throw away items in a home, particularly those with sentimental value. However, keeping certain items soaked by sewage or floodwaters may be unhealthy. Materials that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried within 24-48 hours should be discarded.

## **GARBAGE STORAGE, COLLECTION & DISPOSAL**

As you start cleaning, you will likely produce a great deal of garbage. Local authorities will tell you where and when collection will occur. Garbage invites insects and rodents. Rodents, in particular, may be looking for food because the flood may have destroyed their homes and normal food source.

- Store any garbage in watertight, rodent/insect-proof containers with tight-fitting covers. Use plastic liners if available.
- Put garbage in a convenient location but not near your well.

## **STANDING WATER: PREVENTING MOSQUITO-BORNE ILLNESS**

Heavy rains and flooding can lead to an increase in mosquitoes that may be infected with West Nile virus. To protect against mosquitoes, remain diligent in your personal mosquito protection efforts. Avoid being outdoors when mosquitoes are most active. For many species, this is during the dusk and dawn hours. Also:

- Wear clothing that covers most of your skin.
- Repellents containing DEET (N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide), picaridin or OLE (oil of lemon eucalyptus) are options. Use strictly according to label instructions. Do not allow children to apply repellents and avoid applying repellents to the hands of young children.
- Check around your home to rid the area of standing water.
- Eliminate other breeding sites—remove old tires and turn over or remove empty plastic containers.

For additional information, please contact your local health department or visit [www.semo.state.ny.us](http://www.semo.state.ny.us) or [www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov).