

Recovering from Disaster

Your first concern after a disaster is your family's health and safety.

- ❑ Be aware of new hazards created by the disaster. Watch for washed out roads, contaminated buildings, contaminated water, gas leaks, broken glass, damaged wires and slippery floors.
- ❑ Wear sturdy work boots and gloves. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and clean water often when working in debris.
- ❑ Inform local authorities about health and safety hazards, including chemical releases, downed power lines, washed out roads, smoldering insulation or dead animals.

Returning to a Damaged Home

Returning to a damaged home can be both physically and mentally challenging. Above all, use caution.

Outside the Home

- ❑ Have a battery-powered radio for emergency updates.
- ❑ Wear sturdy work boots and gloves.
- ❑ Walk carefully around the outside of your home and check for loose power lines. Remember to treat all power lines as live and do not touch.
- ❑ Check for gas leaks. If you smell gas, do not enter the home and leave immediately.
- ❑ Check for structural exterior damage such as cracks in the roof, foundation and chimneys. If it looks like the building may collapse, leave immediately.
- ❑ Do not enter if floodwaters remain around the building.
- ❑ A battery-powered flashlight is the best source of light for inspecting a damaged home.
- ❑ Do not use oil, gas lanterns, candles or torches for lighting and do not smoke inside a damaged home, as leaking gas or other flammable materials may be present. Do not turn on the lights until you're sure they're safe to use.
- ❑ If you have any doubts about safety, have your home inspected by a professional before entering.

Inside the Home

- ❑ Enter carefully and check for damage.
- ❑ If you smell gas or hear a hissing or blowing sound, leave immediately. Turn off the main gas valve from the outside, and call the gas company from a neighbor's residence.
- ❑ Carefully check the electrical system and all appliances for sparks, broken or frayed wires. If possible, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. Leave the building and call for help if you have any doubts about safety.

Inside the Home, continued

- ❑ Check the water and sewage systems. If pipes are damaged, turn off the main water valve. Check with local authorities before using any water; it could be contaminated.
- ❑ Clean and disinfect all wet items. Floodwaters can contain sewage and chemicals.
- ❑ If your basement has flooded, pump it out carefully to avoid the potential for collapsed walls and buckled floors.
- ❑ Check refrigerated food for spoilage—your power supply may have been disrupted during the emergency. Throw out all spoiled food and any food that you suspect might be spoiled. (see "Food Safety" section)
- ❑ Call your insurance agent and take photos or video of all damage. Record all repair and cleaning costs.

Accessing Disaster Assistance

As you recover from disaster you should monitor local radio or television reports and other media sources for information about accessing emergency housing, food and financial assistance.

Assistance for individuals and families can come from any number of organizations such as the American Red Cross, which is often stationed on-scene to help people with their most immediate medical, food and housing needs. Other organizations, such as the Salvation Army, church groups and synagogues may also provide food, shelter and supplies, and assist in cleanup efforts.

Local, state and federal agencies such as FEMA and the Small Business Administration (SBA) may have programs available to assist victims of disaster.