



TEXAS DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

STAYING SAFE WHEN RETURNING HOME AFTER A DISASTER

When returning home after a disaster, make plans before you travel. There are many challenges to staying safe while making repairs and cleaning up debris.

Put together a cleanup kit before you go back home. Your kit should include: rubber gloves and boots, cleaning products and clean-up suits, bleach, sponges, goggles, spatula, odor-control products, trash bags, hydrogen peroxide, adhesive bandages, antibiotic ointments and work towels.

Safety Tips: BEFORE Entering a Building

Utility checks: Check for downed or loose power lines and gas leaks. Gas leaks will smell like rotten eggs. Call the utility company immediately if you suspect you have a gas leak. If you see a downed power line, move away from the line and from anything touching it and contact your utility company. Do not try to move the downed power line or anything in contact with it.

Look for external damage: Examine the foundation, roof and chimney for cracks or other damage. Inspect porch roofs and overhangs. If you find obvious damage or have serious doubts about safety, contact a building inspector before you go inside.

Enter the building slowly and carefully: If the door sticks at the top as it opens, it could mean the ceiling is ready to cave in. If you force the door open, stand outside to avoid being hit by falling debris. If in doubt about the safety of a building, do not enter. If the ceiling is sagging, or if there are other signs the building is in a weakened condition or about to collapse, leave the building immediately.

Safety Tips: AFTER Entering a Building

Double check and re-check for gas leaks: To be safe, assume there COULD be a gas leak in the house. Return to your home during daylight to avoid turning on lights. Do not light candles, cigarettes or operate electrical switches in the house until it has been inspected and is safe. If you smell or hear a hissing or blowing sound, open a window and leave immediately. Turn off the main gas valve from the outside, if you can. Call the gas company from a neighbor's residence or from a cell phone away from the building.

Be careful around electricity: If possible, turn off electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If the situation is unsafe, leave the building and call for help. If you are wet, standing in water, or are unsure of your safety, do not check the electrical system. You may want to have an electrician inspect your wiring. Do not turn on the lights until you are sure they're safe to use.

Once the electrical power is turned off, unplug all appliances: Clean them out and let them dry. Then have them checked by a professional before using them again.

Check water and sewage systems: If pipes are damaged, turn off the main water valve. Check with local authorities to make sure the water is not contaminated.

Safety Tips for Cleaning Up

Protective clothing: Wear protective clothing and make sure your hands, arms, feet and legs are covered. If you have cuts on your hands or other body parts, protect them from contact with water or debris. You will want to protect yourself from inhaling harmful odors or fumes while cleaning up. Even people with no known risk factors for mold should wear filtering face masks and gloves if they plan to do anything more than look around.

Use extreme caution as you begin cleaning up: Floors and stairs may be covered with debris and may be very slippery. Watch out for broken bottles, exposed nails, soft spots in the floor and other hazards. When you open cabinets, be on the watch for objects that may fall because they are not in their usual place. Standing water should be removed. Fans at open doors and windows can be used to help with the drying out process. They should blow outward, not inward.

Be careful when dealing with mold: Mold is a fungus with a musty, earthy smell that can grow on items that have been wet for several days, especially after flooding. It also can be hidden behind furniture, under carpets, floors and cabinets, in closets or attics and inside walls. Use protective gear – goggles, a filtering face mask, rubber gloves, and clothing that fully covers arms, legs and feet – when handling mold. Remove mold from hard surfaces by scrubbing with a stiff brush and a mixture of one cup of bleach to one gallon of water. **NEVER MIX BLEACH WITH AMMONIA or products containing ammonia!** If mold covers an area that is larger than 10 square feet, use a professional mold clean-up contractor.

For more information, click on these Web sites:

www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem

www.ready.gov

www.redcross.org



For more information, contact TDEM Public Information at (512) 424-2138 or visit TDEM's Web site: www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem.