

Disaster Relief

Returning Home After a Disaster



Returning home after a major disaster can be dangerous and difficult. Be careful when entering a disaster area, and be ready to adapt to whatever conditions you find.

Use the following information as a guide:

- Keep a battery-operated radio with you to hear any emergency updates.
- Before you enter your house, check the roof and the chimney for structural damage.
- If you have any doubts about safety, have your home inspected by a professional before entering.
- Be careful when entering a damaged building.
- Put on sturdy shoes and work gloves for protection against glass or other debris.
- Stay away from fallen or damaged electrical wires. They could still be live.
- Do not carry lanterns or torches that could start a fire. Use a flashlight only.
- Watch out for animals, especially poisonous snakes that may have come into your home with the floodwaters. Use a stick to poke through debris.
- Check for injured or trapped people. Give first aid where appropriate. Do not move seriously injured people unless they are in immediate danger of further injury. Call for help.
- Remember to help neighbors who may need special assistance: infants, the elderly, and people with disabilities.
- Until phone service is fully restored, use the phone only for life-threatening emergencies.
- Open closets and cupboards carefully.
- Check food and water supplies before using them. Foods that require refrigeration may be spoiled if the electricity was off for some time. Throw out any food that has been in contact with floodwaters.
- Extinguish all open flames.
- Check gas supply. If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing sound, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can, and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, you must have a professional turn it back on.
- Check electricity. If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell hot insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker, and call an electrician for advice.
- Check sewage and water lines. If you suspect damaged sewage lines, avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid using water from the tap.
- Check electrical appliances. If the wiring in your house is wet, turn off the main power switch in the house. Unplug the appliance, dry it out, then reconnect it and turn the main power switch back on. If fuses or circuits blow when the power is restored, turn off the main power switch again, and inspect again for short circuits in the home wiring or appliances. Consult a professional if the problem continues.

- Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, gasoline, or other flammable liquids.
- Try to protect your home from further damage. Open windows and doors. Patch holes.
- Clean and disinfect everything that got wet. The mud left behind by floodwaters can contain sewage and chemicals.
- If your basement is flooded, pump it out gradually (about one-third of the water per day) to avoid damage. The walls may collapse, and the floor may buckle if you pump out the basement while the surrounding ground is still waterlogged.
- Throw out food, cosmetics, and medicines that have come into contact with floodwaters. You can salvage canned foods, but be sure to wash the outside of the can thoroughly. If there is any doubt, discard.
- Stay at home and avoid driving to keep roads clear for emergency workers.
- If you have insurance, call your agent. Take pictures of damages. Keep good records of repair and cleaning costs.
- Get help from your American Red Cross or other community or governmental agencies. They can provide a voucher so you can buy groceries, new clothing, medications, furnishings, and other items for daily living. Be careful about providing personal information to someone who may be pretending to work for a relief agency. Be sure to verify the identity of workers.

Pets after a Disaster

The behavior of your pets may change after an emergency. Normally quiet and friendly pets may become aggressive or defensive. Watch animals closely. Leash dogs, and place them in a fenced yard with access to shelter and water. If, after a disaster, you have to leave town, take your pet with you. Pets are unlikely to survive on their own. However, Keep in mind that many disaster shelters and hotels do not allow pets.

Remember

It takes a long time to recover from a disaster. Take your time, and pace yourself. Plan a reasonable amount of activity each day. Include children in cleanup and recovery activities. Watch for signs of stress in yourself and family members. If you can't shake feelings of despair, seek professional help. While life will not be the same as before the disaster happened, you can and will recover.

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