

# Take Care When Returning to Flood Damaged Homes

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CLINTON, Miss. -- Take extra precautions when returning to flood-damaged homes, apartments or businesses, Mississippi Emergency Management Agency and federal disaster officials urged today.

"The dangers are not over when the water recedes," said MEMA Director Mike Wornack. "Flood hazards such as exposed wires, contaminated floodwater or a weakened foundation are not always obvious but can be life-threatening. We urge people to be very careful."

Terry L. Quarles, the federal officer in charge of the disaster recovery, also warned flood survivors to be careful of potential chemical hazards such as solvents, car batteries, propane tanks and other industrial chemicals.

"If you are unsure of a situation, ask for help or seek advice from an expert," said Quarles.

Disaster officials urge people to keep these safety tips in mind:

## **BEFORE ENTERING A BUILDING:**

*Check the outside of the building:* Call the utility company immediately if you find downed power lines or detect gas leaks. Gas leaks will emit an odor of rotten eggs.

*Look for external damage:* Examine the foundation for cracks or other damage. Inspect porch roofs and overhangs to be sure they are adequately supported. If any portion of the foundation has been undermined, it may not be safe to enter the building. For obvious damage, ask a building inspector to check the house before you go inside.

*Enter the building carefully:* If the door sticks at the top as it opens, it could mean the ceiling is ready to cave in. If you decide to force the door open, stand outside the doorway to avoid being hit by falling debris.

#### **AFTER ENTERING A BUILDING:**

*Look before you step:* Floors and stairs may be covered with debris and be very slippery. Watch out for broken bottles, nails and other hazards.

*Be alert for gas leaks:* Do not strike a match or use an open flame when entering a building unless you know the gas has been turned off and the area has been ventilated. Use a flashlight to inspect for damage.

*Turn off the electricity:* Even if the power company has turned off electricity to the area, be sure to disconnect your house's power supply. Do not use appliances or motors that have gotten wet unless they have been taken apart, cleaned and dried.

*Replace exposed wires:* Exposed electrical wires that are stripped bare of insulation should be considered recyclable junk and be replaced.

*Watch for animals, especially snakes:* Small animals that have been flooded out of their homes may seek shelter in yours. Scare them away by poking a stick into likely hiding places.

*Carbon monoxide exhaust kills:* Do not use generators or other gasoline-powered machines indoors. All cooking on camp stoves and charcoal grills should be done outside. Gas and charcoal fumes can be deadly.

*Drain the basement carefully and slowly:* Drain the basement no more than 1 foot a day to minimize further structural damage.

*Hose the house:* Many health hazards are found in mud and silt that floodwaters leave behind. Shovel as much mud as possible out of the house and then hose it down, inside and out.

*Be aware of health hazards:* Floodwaters pick up sewage and chemicals from roads, farms, factories and storage buildings. Many flooded items, such as wallboard and mattresses, will hold mud and contamination forever. Spoiled food, water-logged cosmetics and medicine are also health hazards. When in doubt, throw them out.

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

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