



## **CLEANING UP AFTER SEVERE WEATHER AND FLOODING** **- *Post-storm safety tips* -**

Richmond, VA -- In the aftermath of recent severe weather and flooding, state officials recommend residents and business owners take safety measures when re-entering and repairing their structures. Residents are encouraged to stay tuned to local news for important announcements and instructions concerning the storm area, medical aid and other forms of assistance, such as food, water, and shelter. The following are safety tips that may help in the recovery effort:

### **Structural Instability**

- Never assume that water-damaged structures or grounds are stable. Buildings that have been submerged or have withstood rushing floodwater may have suffered structural damage and could be dangerous.
- Assume all stairs, floors and roofs are unsafe until they are professionally inspected.
- Leave immediately if shifting or unusual noises signal a possible collapse.
- Consider having professionals/licensed contractors inspect your home for damage and help with repairs. This includes electricians, as well as professionals to inspect gas lines, remove uprooted trees, and check plumbing.
- Remember that downed or damaged trees may contain live power lines.
- Don't work in or around any flood-damaged building until it has been examined and certified as safe for work by a registered professional engineer or architect.
- Use a camera or camcorder to record thoroughly any damage done to your home before any repairs are made.

### **Electrical Hazards**

- If water has been present anywhere near electrical circuits and electrical equipment, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel.
- Never enter flooded areas or touch electrical equipment if the ground is wet, unless you are certain that the power is off. NEVER handle a downed power line.
- Extreme caution is necessary when moving ladders and other equipment near overhead power lines to avoid inadvertent contact.
- Avoid moving trees or branches tangled up in power lines.

## **Food Safety**

- If you have had a power outage, perishable foods including meats, dairy products and eggs that haven't been refrigerated for more than two hours should be discarded because they are no longer safe to consume.
- Foods that have been contaminated by floodwaters should also be discarded.

## **Carbon Monoxide**

- Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that is poisonous to breathe.
- During flood cleanup, operate all gasoline-powered devices such as pumps, generators, and pressure washers outdoors and NEVER bring them indoors.

## **Injuries & Disease**

- People should use caution during clean up efforts to minimize the risk of injury. Residents and their children should avoid areas of floodwater and stay away from any fallen or broken utility lines.
- Rescue workers and citizens working on clean up are at risk for cuts and puncture wounds. Washing out cuts with soap and water is the first priority. Wounds should receive tetanus evaluation.
- Avoid physical exhaustion, and resume a normal sleep schedule as quickly as possible.
- Be alert to emotional exhaustion or strain and consult family members, friends, or professionals for emotional support.
- Protect against mosquito bites by wearing long, loose, and light-colored clothing. Use insect repellent with the smallest percentage of DEET necessary for the length of time you are exposed to mosquitoes, but no more than 50% for adults and 30% for children under 12.

## **Private Well Water**

- People who rely on private wells for their water should consider their well contaminated if it was submerged or they believe it is possible flooding submerged the well.
- If the well was flooded and underwater, the water should not be consumed until bacteriological testing indicates the well is not contaminated. Two samples taken on consecutive days are recommended.
- Adding regular chlorine bleach to water in the well and letting it sit at least four hours before using should disinfect the well. The recommended amount of bleach varies depending on the amount of water in the well; however, a quart of unscented bleach should be adequate for most home wells.
- Until the well water is confirmed to be safe, water used for drinking, brushing teeth or cooking or preparing food should be either bottled water or water that has been boiled for a minimum of one minute.

## **Septic Systems**

- If flooding has occurred, septic systems may have failed or washed away. The system should be checked to determine if erosion has occurred or the system has been damaged. If any part of the system is exposed or appears damaged, people should contact their local health department to receive recommendations for proper corrections.
- If the septic system has been flooded, sewage can back up into the home. Sewage contains disease-causing microorganisms. When cleaning up be sure to wear gloves, disinfect contaminated surfaces with diluted bleach water, and thoroughly wash yourself and your clothing immediately after cleaning.

## **How to Clean Mold from Your House**

- Mold will grow in flooded buildings that do not dry out quickly and can cause health problems for some people. The following tips are suggested for residents dealing with mold:
- Remove mold and mildew from walls, floors, and other surfaces with a detergent solution, household bleach, or commercial surface cleaner.
- Never mix chlorine bleach of any type with ammonia as the mixture produces deadly fumes. After scrubbing the mold and mildew, the surface should be disinfected with a bleach solution.
- Make sure the work area always has adequate ventilation.
- Get rid of all household items that have been soaked in water and cannot be adequately cleaned, such as soft furniture, mattresses, stuffed toys, and carpeting.
- Any wooden items used to prepare, serve, or contain food should be discarded.
- Hard surface materials that can be thoroughly washed or dry-cleaned can be kept after cleaning.

For more information on disaster safety and other updates, check the Virginia Department of Emergency Management Web site at [www.vaemergency.com](http://www.vaemergency.com).