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Tips to Minimize Property Damage from Heavy Storms

Philadelphia – The Water Department cautions residents that the possibility of flooding warnings may occur over the next few days. Philadelphia and the region may be challenged by heavy rainfall deposited in the area in a relatively short period of time. Some sections of the city may experience sewer backups into properties at varying degrees as a result of this storm.

Sewer backups occur when the volume of water going into the city's combined sewers exceeds the capacity of the sewer. Properties that have deep basements and shallow sewer systems, or properties that are located in low lying areas may be more vulnerable to property flooding. When sewers are overwhelmed, basement fixtures such as floor drains, toilets, and showers act as relief valves for these sewers that are flowing under flooding pressure. If your basement is vulnerable to flooding, you should take the following steps to minimize potential damage:

If possible, seal any floor drains in your basement, as they are the lowest points of entry of sewer backup.

Do not store valuable items in your basement. These items should be stored above past flood levels, on high shelves for example. Keep irreplaceable items out of your basement. Relocate any valuables stored in your basement before the rainfall begins.

To prevent sewer blockages in your home's sewer lateral and the city's sewer system, never pour grease, paint, or other thick liquids into sinks or drains. Avoid flushing items that are not suitable for sanitary sewer disposal such as paper towels, diaper wipes, contraceptive and feminine products.

Check with your insurance company to verify if you have flood and sewer backup coverage, especially if your basement is finished. If you do not have coverage, ask them for information about separate riders to your policy and what will be necessary to obtain these riders.

If a sewer backup occurs in your property due to heavy rains, you should always:

Call the Philadelphia Water Department at 215-685-6300 to report the flooding. This information is extremely important to the Department in help identify flooding areas, what types of storms cause flooding, and to verify which city blocks are impacted and the frequency of such flooding. The Water Department uses this information to investigate flooding occurrences, evaluate the magnitude of flooding problems throughout the city and to ensure that our long-term plans to address chronic flood areas are effective and sustainable.

Never enter a flooded basement due to the risk of electrocution. Wait for the water to subside.

Basements that have been flooded with sewage containing water should be thoroughly cleaned. Disinfect all floors and walls, and other objects that have come in contact with this water using a mixture of a quarter-cup of bleach per one gallon of clean water. Wipe down all areas touched by the flood water. Wear gloves and boots while disinfecting.

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