

Disaster Relief

Safety Rules and Recovery Procedures after a Natural Disaster

- See that your family is safe from flood crests, fire, or falling buildings.
- Cooperate fully with local authorities, rescue squads, and American Red Cross chapters.
- Consult your insurance claims adjuster.
- Walk or drive cautiously. Debris-filled streets are dangerous. Snakes and rodents may be a hazard. Washouts may weaken road and bridge structures that could collapse under a vehicle's weight.
- Help locate shelter, food, clothing, transportation, medical supplies, and medical help for victims.
- Obey health regulations for personal and community protection against disease epidemics. Report any violations.
- Set priorities. Do the most important tasks first, and avoid physical overexertion.
- Be sure children are safe and being cared for at all times. Never leave young children alone, and do not let them play in damaged buildings or areas that might be unsafe.
- Before entering a building, check for structural damage. Make sure it is not in danger of collapsing. Turn off any outside gas lines, and let the house air for several minutes to remove escaping gas.
- When entering damaged buildings, use flashlights only. Do not use matches, torches, or any open flame. Watch for nails, splinters, holes in walls or floors, wet or falling plaster, undermined foundations, and gas leaks.
- Do not use the electrical system in a damaged building until a professional electrician has checked it.
- Wait until any flood waters are below basement level before trying to drain or pump a basement.
- If the premises have been flooded, flush plumbing fixtures with buckets of water to be sure they are open. Have health authorities inspect sanitary disposal systems. Water may have backed up into the septic tank, which in turn backs up into your house. This could be a health hazard.
- Do not use water from private supply until health authorities have tested it. Boil drinking water 10 minutes, or chlorinate by adding 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach per gallon of water.
- Do not use food that has come in contact with flood waters. You can save some foods if they are properly packaged. Consult local health officials if in doubt.
- Sanitize dishes, cooking utensils, and food preparation areas before using them.
- Start cleanup as soon as possible, especially if flooding has occurred. Thoroughly dry and clean your house before trying to live in it. Delay permanent repairs until buildings are thoroughly dry.
- Control rodents and insects.
- Keep chemicals used for disinfecting and poisons used for insect and rodent control out of the reach of children.
- Wear protective clothing on legs, arms, feet, and hands while cleaning up debris. Wear rubber gloves while scrubbing flood-damaged interiors and furniture.
- Remove sediment from heaters, flues, and motors before using them. To speed drying, start stoves and furnaces or air conditioners as soon as they have been checked for safety.
- Take all furniture and rugs outdoors to dry.
- Dry and air bedding, clothing, and rugs as soon as possible to prevent mildew.
- Give special attention to cleaning children's toys, cribs, playpens, and play equipment. Boil any items a toddler or baby might put in his mouth. Discard stuffed toys, waterlogged toys, and non-cleanable toys.

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Electrical Systems and Appliances - Damaged Wiring and Switches

You may be able to repair flood-damaged electric wiring and switches yourself if you take certain precautions. Follow these steps before attempting your own repair.

1. Disconnect the main switch and any switches that control pumps and out buildings.
2. Remove all branch circuit fuses so no one can reconnect the electricity while you are working on equipment and wiring. Wear rubber gloves, because electrical leakage may be present if the switch box is filled with mud or debris.
3. Clean dirt and debris from load center panels and all switch, outlet, and junction boxes. Leave them open to dry out.
4. Let the entire wiring system dry out, uncovering all possible openings to hasten drying.
5. To clean rigid conduit wiring, cut the wires and pull them out. Blow or suck air through the conduit to dry it.
6. When the entire system is dry, have an electrician check it for leakage and grounds.

After you have taken all of these precautions, it should be safe to check the wiring by following these steps:

- Replace the main fuses, and close the main switch. If there is current leakage, the switch needs further repair or replacement.
- If there is no evidence of leakage, insert a fuse in one of the branch circuits, and close the main switch. Additional repair is necessary if the fuse blows or if there is any sign of smoking or heating.
- After all circuits have been repaired and checked one at a time, insert all branch fuses.