

# Hurricane/Tornado Recovery Efforts and Clean-Up Hazards FactSheet

HS05-042A (7-05)

Hurricanes and tornados can cause a lot of damage and destruction, creating many hazards for workers responsible for recovery and cleanup. Many workers such as utility workers, law enforcement personnel, firefighters, emergency medical personnel, and military personnel who are required to provide assistance during a natural disaster may also be required to help with recovery and cleanup. Contractors may be employed to help with efforts. In addition, employees may be required to assist with recovery and cleanup at their worksite. All employees must beware of the many hazards that can cause injuries or illnesses after a storm.

Employers and employees should take preventive measures to ensure safety during recovery and cleanup efforts after a hurricane or tornado.

- Inspect the worksite before allowing workers to enter. Evaluate building structures, roadways, surfaces, trenches and excavations for damage, stability and safety.
- Establish a plan for contacting emergency personnel in the event of an emergency.
- Report hazards such as downed power lines, frayed electric wires, gas leaks, or snakes to the appropriate authorities.
- Take frequent rest breaks, especially when lifting heavy, water-laden objects.
- Practice good lifting techniques to avoid overexertion and back injuries.
- Provide first-aid kits to care for minor cuts and abrasions.
- Beware of overhead and underground lines, especially when moving ladders or equipment near them.
- Provide plenty of fire extinguishers on-site and re-evaluate the fire evacuation plan for use during clean up.
- Inform workers in areas where debris is being collected and deposited of any special hazards



Photo courtesy NOAA Photo Library, NOAA Central Library; OAR/ERL National Severe Storms Laboratory (NSSL)

they may encounter during recovery efforts.

- Protect workers exposed to vehicular traffic during the clean-up operations by posting warning signs along roadways to warn drivers of work in progress. Utilize flaggers, traffic cones and highway channeling devices to steer traffic away from workers along the roadway.
- Develop and use a site plan for collection of debris – provide traffic flow details and train workers to stay clear of all motorized equipment.
- Train workers to never position themselves between mechanical equipment, blind spots, and a fixed object.
- Provide all workers with high-visibility reflective vests to be easily spotted by equipment operators, emergency vehicles, vehicular drivers, and others.
- Provide all workers with personal protective equipment, including hard hats, safety glasses, work boots and gloves.
- Ensure all motorized equipment has operational “back-up” alarms, so nearby workers are aware of movements.
- Provide radio equipment to all spotters and equipment operators, so warnings can be communicated.
- Require the use of seatbelts and rollover protection for all equipment where hazards of tip-over are present.

- Do not allow workers to enter debris piles while the debris is being worked by mechanical equipment.
- Train workers to recognize, report, and avoid hazardous chemicals discovered during debris clean up.
- Train equipment operators, spotters, and workers to keep equipment more than 10 feet away from overhead power lines.
- **Assume all wires and power lines are energized!**



Photo courtesy NOAA/Wes Tyler, Photographer

The Texas Department of Insurance Occupational Safety and Health Consultation (OSHCON) program can help small employers (250 or fewer per worksite and no more than 500 employees corporate-wide) that are affected by a hurricane or tornado. The experienced, professional OSHCON consultants can provide occupational health or safety assistance by identifying hazards that result from damage and destruction caused by a storm and specific hazards employees may be exposed to during recovery and cleanup.

This factsheet was produced with information from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation.

The Texas Department of Insurance,  
Division of Workers' Compensation (TDI/DWC)  
E-mail [resourcecenter@tdi.state.tx.us](mailto:resourcecenter@tdi.state.tx.us)  
or call 1-800-687-7080 for more information.

*Safety Violations Hotline*  
**1-800-452-9595**  
[safetyhotline@tdi.state.tx.us](mailto:safetyhotline@tdi.state.tx.us)