



RE-ENTRY FACT SHEET

GOING BACK HOME: A Citizen's Guide To Returning Home After A Storm

After a hurricane has passed an evacuated area, your local leaders and officials will determine when residents can return home. That decision will be based on many factors, including things like road conditions, public safety considerations, availability of electricity and clean drinking water.

Once local leaders clear the area for people to return home, there are many things you should consider when re-entering your community and during the clean-up phase, even if you didn't evacuate.

ABOUT OIL

Are there concerns related to oil being brought in by a storm?

Because of the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster resulting in the oil leak, this year has brought new concerns for residents along the coast. In reality, any oil carried in by a hurricane from the BP spill would be "weathered" and would likely pose a much lower health risk than common post-storm concerns such as raw sewage and dangerous debris. Still, the state has taken special steps to ensure oiled areas are dealt with safely.

What should I do if I see oil in my home?

Call 1-800-424-8802 to report oil contamination. Teams will be sent out to assess neighborhoods where oil is sighted. Depending on the extent of the damage, take caution in dealing with the oil. Small amounts of oil can be cleaned much like other floodwater remnants. Large amounts of oil may require more intense remediation. In neighborhoods where the presence of extensive oil contamination has been verified, specific advice for clean-up and re-entry procedures will be provided.

What if I get oil on me?

Do your best to avoid bare skin contact with visible oil contamination. Wash skin with soap and water promptly if you come into contact with oil.

What if there are strong petroleum odors around my home?

If you are particularly sensitive to odors or have a pre-existing medical condition such as upper respiratory problems that could be aggravated by the odor, you should avoid the areas where the odor is bothersome.

Is it safe for my pets to go outside if there is oil present?

No. Do not allow pets to come into contact with oil contamination.

GOING HOME

What precautions should I take when I am allowed to go home after the storm?

You should wear sturdy clothing and hard-sole shoes when returning home or working around the home. You should also wear appropriate leather or sturdy gloves when handling outdoor objects. Avoid broken glass and other sharp objects.

Use extreme caution when coming upon any injured animals or pets. Beware of snakes and other dangerous creatures, especially if there has been flooding.

What supplies should I bring with me when I return home?

Bring a well-supplied first aid kit. You should also remember to bring food and water in anticipation of finding unusable food and water in your home.

What steps do I need to take when I first return?

Open all windows and doors when entering a building that has been damaged by wind or water. Assess your home for structural damage that may have been caused by falling trees or wind damage. If you are not sure about whether or not your home is livable after the storm, consult with a professional.

Is it safe to keep or eat foods that were in my home during the storm if the power went out?

Refrigerated foods that have reached a temperature of 41 degrees or more, or which have been kept for 8 to 12 hours without refrigeration should be used immediately or discarded. Do not refreeze thawed foods. Wash and sanitize (using 1 ½ cups of household bleach to one gallon of water) cans of food (and can openers as well) that have been exposed to flood waters prior to opening them. If fresh fruits and vegetables or food in plastic, cardboard or paper containers have been under flood waters, do not eat them.

Will it be safe to drink the water when I return home?

Do not drink water until it has been declared safe for drinking or has been boiled according to recommendations. Public drinking water systems will be cleared by the state and the local water system. Private wells are the responsibility of the owner and should be decontaminated appropriately before being cleared. Pregnant women should drink only bottled water, not boiled water, and infant formula should not be made with boiled water. Even if I don't drink the water, is it safe to use the plumbing in my kitchen or bathroom?

If the septic tank or drain field is still under water or if the system is not working correctly you should avoid using plumbing system.

What should I do if there are downed electric power lines on my property?

Avoid any contact with any downed electric power lines on your property. Treat all electrical power lines as if they are still energized until it is verified that they are not by a professional responder.

Should I be worried about gas or broken fuel lines near my home or business?

When returning to your home or business, you should be aware of possible combustible or explosive gases – natural gas and other fuel lines may be broken during a hurricane and highly explosive gas vapors may still be present in many buildings. Other explosive gases may accumulate from decaying materials.



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What should I do if I smell gas or hear a hissing noise?

Do not smoke, light matches, operate electrical switches, use either cell or conventional telephones, or create another source of ignition. Leave doors and windows open and leave the building immediately. Once safely outside of the building, notify local emergency authorities and do not return until authorities tell you that you may do so.

Is it safe to swim or walk in floodwaters?

No. Do not wade or swim in floodwaters. Assume all floodwaters could be contaminated with dangerous bacteria. Bathe and wash yourself and clothing in hot, soapy water after contact with floodwaters.

How should I dispose of waste from my home or yard? Can I throw it away in the same disposal bin?

You should segregate all wastes generated into five categories to avoid health risks:

- Vegetative yard waste (tree limbs, leaves, etc.);
- Household chemicals, paint, herbicides, pesticides, caustic and flammable liquids (keep these items separated and in their original containers);
- White goods (refrigerators, washers, dryers, stoves and similar appliances);
- Electronic appliances (computers, laptops, televisions, stereos, etc.);
- All other solid, nonhazardous wastes/debris (building materials, furniture, etc.).

When placing these wastes at curbside for pickup, keep each group separated from the other.

GENERATORS AND POWER SOURCES

Is it safe to use a generator for power after the hurricane?

Yes, operate the generator in the manner it was designed by the manufacturer. Use appropriate earth grounds and grounding techniques. Do not back feed (connect to existing house wiring). Never place the generator indoors. Placing the generator indoors can cause carbon monoxide poisoning – carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless gas that is produced when any fuel is burned, and is lethal in high concentrations if trapped indoors or confined spaces.

How far away from my home should I place generators or other fuel-burning devices?

You should always ensure fuel-burning devices such as gasoline-powered generators, gasoline-powered pressure washers, camp stoves and lanterns or charcoal grills are used outside your home and 10 feet away from windows, doors or other intakes. Opening doors and windows or using fans will not prevent CO buildup in your home. Have vents and chimneys checked to assure that debris does not block or impede the exhaust from water heaters and gas furnaces. If you start to feel sick, dizzy or weak while using a generator, you must get to fresh air right away. Death or full incapacitation can result quickly from CO poisoning.

How should fuels be stored when they are not in use?

Cans of fuel, flammable liquids or gasses should never be stored indoors or next to ignition sources such as operating gas water heaters or stoves.

CLEANING UP

When I begin cleaning my home or business after the hurricane, what should I do to stay safe?

Always make sure to provide fresh air by opening windows and doors. Allow adequate time for the area or structure to air out. Use fans both during and after the use of disinfecting, cleaning and sanitizing products.

What should I do to ensure electricity is used safely?

If there is no standing water in the building and it is safe to use electricity, be sure before using any electrical appliances that they are properly grounded and, where possible, connected to a ground break equipped electrical source (GFI circuit). Do not overload circuits or extension cords causing an electrical fire. And always have safety devices readily available for emergencies such as an A-B-C fire extinguisher.

Do I need to take any extra precautions when cleaning? What should I avoid?

Wash your hands frequently and wear rubber gloves. Individuals with respiratory allergies, or other respiratory illnesses, should not handle or disturb materials that have visible mold growth. Be aware of the possibility of mold, bacteria and other contaminants. Porous, absorbent, or spongy materials that remain wet for more than 48 hours should be cleaned throughout or thrown away.

Do I need to use special cleaners or detergents?

Materials that can be cleaned should be washed with a detergent solution, rinsed with clear water, and rinsed again with a biocidal solution such as 1 1/2 cups of household chlorine bleach mixed with one gallon of water. Allow this solution to stay in contact with the material for five minutes and rinse again with clear water. Avoid skin contact with the solution and use only in well-ventilated areas. Some materials, such as textiles, may be damaged by the bleach solution. Remember that the use of biocides (disinfectants) is no substitute for drying and cleaning materials. Make sure the materials are dry before cleaning. If they cannot be dried out, throw them away. Contaminated upholstered furniture, bedding and books are much more difficult to clean than carpet and should usually be thrown away because cleaning may be more expensive than replacement. Remember to keep all household products locked and out of reach of children. Use child-resistant packaging properly by closing the container securely after each use. Keep items in original containers. Call 1-800-222-1222 (Louisiana Poison Control Center, in Louisiana only) immediately in case of poisoning.

