



NEWS RELEASE

Virginia Department of Emergency Management

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Safety important during clean up

RICHMOND – Homeowners should be aware of potential dangers they could encounter when they return home after a flood. Flooded property can present many hazards; homeowners should follow important safety tips. If there has been a backflow of sewage into the house, the following measures should be taken to ensure proper clean up:

- Walls, hard-surfaced floors and many other household surfaces must be cleaned with soap and water and disinfected with a solution of one cup of bleach to five gallons of water.
- Thoroughly disinfect surfaces that come in contact with food and children's play areas.
- Wash all linens and clothing in hot water or dry-clean.
- Items that cannot be washed or dry-cleaned, such as mattresses and upholstered furniture, must be air dried in the sun and sprayed thoroughly with a disinfectant.
- Steam-clean all carpeting.
- Fiberboard, fibrous insulation and disposable filters that have contacted floodwater or sewage should be replaced in your heating and air conditioning system.
- Wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup.
- As you clean up your home, be careful about mixing household cleaners and disinfectants, because combining certain types of products can produce toxic fumes and result in injury or death.
- It can be difficult to throw away items in a home, particularly those with sentimental value. However, keeping certain items soaked by sewage or floodwaters may be unhealthy. In general, materials that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried within 24 to 48 hours should be discarded.

Mold

- Moisture that enters buildings from leaks or flooding accelerates mold growth. Molds can cause disease, trigger allergic reactions and continue to damage materials long after the storm. Failure to control moisture and mold can present short and long-term health risks.
- To protect against health risks associated with mold:
- Remove standing water from your home or office.
- Remove wet materials.
- If mold growth has already occurred, carefully remove or clean the moldy material.

- Consider using personal protective equipment when cleaning or removing mold including gloves, goggles and an N-95 particle respirator (found at most local hardware stores). Check with a health care provider before wearing a respirator. Do not use a respirator if you have heart disease or chronic lung disease such as asthma or emphysema.
- Individuals with known mold allergies or asthma should not clean or remove moldy materials.
- Remember to not mix cleaners and disinfectants, as hazardous gases may produce hazardous chemical reactions. Read and follow label instructions carefully. Open windows and doors to provide plenty of fresh air.

Contaminated Food -- “When in doubt, throw it out!”

In the case of an electrical outage, it is important to take careful precautions to ensure food safety. The risk of food poisoning is heightened when refrigerators and ovens are inoperable. Discard any food that has been at room temperature for two hours or more and any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture.

Discard any food without a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with floodwaters. Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if you remove the labels thoroughly, wash the cans, and then disinfect the cans with a solution consisting of 1/4 cup of unscented household bleach per gallon of water. Re-label your cans, including the expiration date, with a marker. Food containers with screw-caps, snap lids and home canned foods should be discarded if they have come in contact with floodwaters because they cannot be disinfected.

Contaminated Items

Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers. There is no way to safely clean them if they have come in contact with contaminated floodwaters. Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes and utensils with soap and hot water, and sanitize by boiling them in clean water or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of one-quarter cup of household bleach per gallon of water.

Food Safety Precautions

- 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 flooding should also be discarded.
- Be particularly careful to thoroughly disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with food, such as counter tops, pantry shelves, pots and pans, dishes and inside refrigerators, etc.

Hygiene

Basic hygiene is very important during natural disaster. Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected and cooled. You should wash your hands:

- Before preparing or eating food
- After using the bathroom or changing a diaper
- After handling uncooked food
- After playing with a pet
- After handling garbage
- After tending to someone who is sick or injured
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing

- After participating in flood cleanup activities
- After handling articles contaminated with floodwater or sewage.

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