AFTER THE FLOOD:
Getting Back Into Your Home Safely

NC DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES
Division of Public Health

A building that has been flooded can be a dangerous place. This factsheet will provide information about cleaning up and making your home safe to live in again.

We recommend that these tips be followed **to the extent possible** *but acknowledge there are situations that may prevent the use of some recommended equipment or precautions.*

Watch out for these dangers:

Never assume that a water-damaged house is safe. Going into a building that has been flooded, even after the water is gone, can present a wide variety of hazards that can cause injury, illness or even death. **Do not allow children in the home** after the flood or while it is being inspected, cleaned or repaired.

Stay safe while you work. If possible:

- **Wear a hard hat and safety goggles** when there is a danger of falling materials.
- **Wear leather work gloves** to protect your hands from cuts, or rubber gloves to prevent exposure to hazardous chemicals.
- **Wear rubber boots or hard-soled boots,** preferably with steel toes, when working and lifting.
- **Wear an N95 mask.**
  - At hardware or home supply stores, look for a mask with NIOSH approval and an N95 rating. Both labels should be on the mask and the container.
  - More info on NIOSH approved N95 masks, also called filtering facepiece respirators: https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/topics/respirators/disp_part/default.html
  - N95 masks do not protect against gases, vapors, or odors.
  - Do not use masks with beards, facial hair or other conditions that interfere with the face to facepiece seal.

- **Do not engage in cleanup activities or wear masks if you have medical conditions** such as heart problems or breathing issues that could be aggravated by the work activities or by the respirator itself.
- **Stay alert.** Accidents happen when people are tired. Take the breaks you need, and drink plenty of fluids (bottled water) to avoid dehydration.
- **Be careful lifting.** To avoid back injuries when lifting or handling heavy and bulky loads like furniture or carpet, avoid lifting loads of more than 50 pounds per person.
- **Get help with potentially hazardous materials.** Before you disturb or remove materials that may be hazardous, take precautions to prevent exposure.
  - If there is a noticeable chemical odor and/or a spilled container of a hazardous material in the building, **ask your local health department or fire department for help.**
  - If there is asbestos or lead paint in the building, **call NC Health Hazards Control at (919) 707-5950.**
- **Be prepared.** If you get a cut or a puncture wound that is exposed to floodwater or the dirt it leaves behind, see a doctor. Make sure your tetanus immunization is up to date before you work. Once immunized, adults should have a routine "booster" every ten years.

Take these steps for safe reoccupation:

- Building must be completely dry.
- Dirt and trash left by the flood must be removed from building materials and furnishings.
- Moldy or mildewed items must be completely cleaned and disinfected or must be thrown away.
  - If not, mold and mildew may return and possibly cause health problems.
  - Carpet and padding cannot be cleaned well enough to prevent mold and mildew from growing. **Throw them away.**

Contact information for NCDHHS Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Branch:
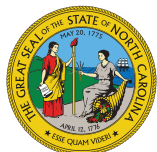
- 919-707-5900 or oeeb@dhhs.nc.gov

Contact information for county health departments:

- www.dph.ncdhhs.gov/contact/LHD

Other useful information for flood cleanup and health and safety issues:

- CDC Guidelines for Cleaning Safely After a Disaster: https://www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/safety/index.html
- CDC Guidelines for Protecting Yourself From Chemicals After a Disaster: https://www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/safety/guidelines-for-protecting-yourself-from-chemicals-after-a-disaster.html
- EPA: www.epa.gov/mold
- EPA: https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2017-08/documents/mold._homeowners_and_renters_guide_to_cleanup_after_disasters.pdf