



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 - Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5520

www.adph.org

Use caution when returning to a storm-damaged home

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Jim McVay, Dr.P.A.
(334) 206-5600

The Alabama Department of Public Health would like to share these health and safety recommendations developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to guide people returning to their homes after disasters.

Health

- Be aware of exhaustion. Don't try to do too much at once. Set priorities and pace yourself. Get enough rest.
- Drink plenty of clean water and eat well.
- Wear sturdy work boots and gloves.
- Wash your hands thoroughly and often with soap and clean water when working in debris.

Safety Issues

- Be aware of new safety issues created by the disaster. Watch for washed out roads, contaminated buildings, contaminated water, gas leaks, broken glass, damaged electrical wiring and slippery floors.
- Inform local authorities about health and safety issues, including chemical spills, downed power lines, unsafe roads, smoldering insulation and dead animals.

Use Caution When Returning Home

- Keep a battery-powered radio with you so you can listen for emergency updates and news reports.
- Use a battery-powered flashlight to inspect a damaged home. (Note: The flashlight should be turned on outside before entering - the battery may produce a spark that could ignite leaking gas, if present.)
- Watch out for animals, especially poisonous snakes. Use a stick to poke through debris.
- Use the phone only to report life-threatening emergencies.
- Stay off the streets when possible. If you must go out, watch for fallen objects; downed electrical wires; and weakened walls, bridges, roads and sidewalks.

Before You Enter Your Home

Walk carefully around the outside and check for loose power lines, gas leaks and structural damage. If you have any doubts about safety, have your residence inspected by a qualified building inspector or structural engineer before entering.

Do not enter if:

- You smell gas.
- Your home was damaged by fire and the authorities have not declared it safe.

Going Inside Your Home

When you go inside your home, there are steps you should take to protect yourself. Enter the home carefully and check for damage. Be aware of loose boards and slippery floors.

The following items are other things to check inside your home:

- **Natural gas.** If you smell gas or hear a hissing or blowing sound, open a window and leave immediately. Turn off the main gas valve from the outside, if you can. Call the gas company. If you shut off the gas supply at the main valve, you will need a professional to turn it back on. Do not smoke or use oil, gas lanterns, candles, or torches for lighting inside a damaged home until you are sure there is no leaking gas or other flammable materials present.
- **Sparks, broken or frayed wires.** Check the electrical system unless you are wet, standing in water, or unsure of your safety. If possible, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If the situation is unsafe, leave the building and call for help. Do not turn on the lights until you are sure they are safe to use. You may want to have an electrician inspect your wiring.
- **Roof, foundation and chimney cracks.** If it looks like the building may collapse, leave immediately.
- **Appliances.** If appliances are wet, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. Then, unplug appliances and let them dry out. Have appliances checked by a professional before using them again. Also, have the electrical system checked by an electrician before turning the power back on.
- **Water and sewage systems.** If pipes are damaged, turn off the main water valve. Check with local authorities before using any water; the water could be contaminated. Pump out wells and have the water tested by authorities before drinking. Do not flush toilets until you know that sewage lines are intact.
- **Food and other supplies.** Throw out all food and other supplies that you suspect may have become contaminated.
- **Your basement.** If your basement has flooded, pump it out gradually (about one third of the water per day) to avoid damage. The walls may collapse and the floor may buckle if the basement is pumped out while the surrounding ground is still waterlogged.
- **Open cabinets.** Be alert for objects that may fall.
- **Clean up household chemical spills.** Disinfect items that may have been contaminated by raw sewage, bacteria or chemicals. Also clean salvageable items.
- **Call your insurance agent.** Take pictures of damages. Keep good records of repair and cleaning costs.

Being Wary of Wildlife and Other Animals

Wild animals have an unpredictable nature.

- Do not approach or attempt to help an injured or stranded animal.
- Do not corner wild animals or try to rescue them.
- Do not approach wild animals that have taken refuge in your home. If you encounter animals in this situation, open a window or provide another escape route and the animal will likely leave on its own. Do not attempt to capture or handle the animal.
- Do not attempt to move a dead animal. Animal carcasses can present serious health risks.