

Safety Matters

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Flood Cleanup Hazards

Cleanup work of any kind can be dangerous, but flood conditions make this work even harder. However, following the recommendations set by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) will help keep you safe and healthy while cleaning up.

Health Tips:

- Take frequent rest breaks when lifting heavy, water-laden objects. Avoid overexertion and practice good lifting techniques. Also, consider using teams of two or more to move bulky items that weigh more than 50 pounds. Or, use a proper automatic lifting assistance device, if practical.
- When working in hot environments, have plenty of water available to drink, use sunscreen and take frequent rest breaks out of the sun. Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- Be sure that a first aid kit is available in case of cuts or other small injuries. If you do get hurt while working, protect the injury with waterproof gloves and dressings.
- Wash your hands often during the day, especially before eating, drinking, touching your face or applying cosmetics.

General Precautions:

- Before entering a flooded area, use a wooden stick or pole to check for pits,

holes and protruding objects.

- Ensure that all ladders and scaffolds are properly secured prior to use.
- Conduct a preliminary worksite inspection to verify stability before entering a flooded or formerly flooded building, or before operating vehicles over roadways or surfaces. Do not work in or around any flood-damaged building until it has been examined and certified as safe for work by a registered professional engineer or architect.
- Washouts, trenches, excavations and gullies must be supported or their stability should be verified prior to entry. All trenches should be supported with a trench box.
- Establish a plan among employees for contacting medical personnel in the event of an emergency.
- Report any obvious hazards (downed power lines, frayed electric wires, gas leaks or snakes) to the appropriate authorities and your supervisor.
- Use fuel-powered generators outdoors



only, as they present a carbon monoxide hazard.

- Use life vests when engaged in activities that could result in deep water exposure.
- Use extreme caution when handling containers holding unknown substances or known toxic substances. If you see any of these hazards, alert your supervisor so he/she can contact the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for disposal information.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Clothing

- Always wear watertight boots with a steel toe and insole, gloves, long pants and safety glasses during cleanup operations; street shoes should not be worn because they cannot protect against punctures, bites or crush injuries. Also wear a hardhat if there is a risk of falling debris.
- Wear a NIOSH-approved dust respirator, if you are working with moldy building materials or with vegetable matter (hay, stored grain or compost).
- When handling bleach or other chemicals, follow the directions on the package and wear eye, hand and face protection. Also have plenty of clean water available for emergency eye washing or other first aid.

Electrical Hazards

- Do not touch downed power lines or any object or water they may be in

contact with.

- Treat all power lines as if they are energized until you have specific confirmation that they have been de-energized.
- Beware of overhead and underground power lines when clearing debris. Extreme caution is necessary when moving ladders or other equipment near overhead power lines to avoid accidental contact.
- If damage to an electrical system is suspected (examples: wiring has been under water, you can smell burning insulation, wires are visibly frayed or you can see sparks), turn off the electrical system in the building and follow all lockout/tagout procedures. Do not turn the power back on until the electrical equipment has been inspected by a qualified electrician.
- When using a generator, be sure that the main circuit breaker is OFF and is locked out prior to starting. This will prevent unintentional energization of power lines from back feed electrical energy and will help protect utility line workers from possible electrocution.
- Be aware that de-energized power lines may become energized by a secondary power source.
- Any electrical equipment used in wet environments must be marked for use in wet locations and must be undamaged. Be sure that all connections are out of

water.

- All cord-connected, electrically operated tools and equipment must be grounded or double-insulated.
- Ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) must be used in all wet locations.

Fire Protection

- Immediately evacuate any building that has a gas leak until it is controlled and the area is ventilated.
- Be sure that an adequate number of fire extinguishers are available.
- Be sure that all fire exits are clear of debris and sandbags.