



Utilities and Structure Safety After a Flood

Gas & Electric Safety

Once you return to a flood-affected home, make sure the gas and electric service is off. Then use your nose to check the house for any gas odor. Never smoke or use an open flame for light during this process. If you smell gas, clear out and notify the gas company fast. Tell them to check whether gas lines have been flooded. Most home gas systems operate at relatively low pressure, and flooding of any depth will back water into the gas lines. These lines must be purged and cleaned before they can be used again, and experts must handle these jobs. Also check for electrical hazards like damaged or wet wires and outlets, so that when the juice flows, you're not in for any more shocks.

Electrical Safety

Electrical safety precautions are a must when you re-enter buildings that have been flooded. First, make sure electrical service is turned off before going back into a building for the first time. Do that by turning off the main electrical switch and all circuits. Until you do, never come into contact with standing water: there could be some hot wires below the water line. Throw away submerged fuse boxes and all of their contents. Remove covers from all outlets and fuses or breaker boxes and flush them with clean water. Allow time for drying and then spray them with contact cleaner or lubricant. And don't turn the electricity back on until the whole system has been checked by a licensed electrician.

Carbon Monoxide

If you are without electricity, you may have turned to fuel-burning sources for heat, light and other needs. **USE GREAT CAUTION.** Fuel-burning devices in closed-in areas pose a great risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide has no odor and you can't see it, but it can kill you! Here are symptoms to watch out for. A mild headache that gets worse, shortness of breath and irritability. Poor judgment, memory loss and rapid fatigue are all signs of carbon monoxide poisoning. The symptoms can lead rapidly to coma and death. To treat carbon monoxide poisoning, immediately get everybody -- and your pets -- out of the building. Provide fresh air and call medical assistance at once.

Make sure ventilation is good whenever you use kerosene lamps, wood-stoves or fireplaces. **NEVER** use a gas oven or range to heat your house. **NEVER** burn charcoal in your house or garage to heat or cook. Provide plenty of ventilation when using a gas-powered pump for flooded basements or a gas-powered generator for electricity. Install and maintain carbon monoxide detectors.