

## After the Flood: Urgent Safety Tips for Business Owners

**TAKE IMMEDIATE STEPS TO ENSURE PERSONAL SAFETY.  
DO NOT ENTER A FLOOD-DAMAGED BUILDING WITHOUT  
ENSURING PROTECTION FROM COLLAPSE, ELECTROCUTION,  
HAZARDOUS MATERIALS, AND CONTAMINATION.**

Cleaning up a flood-ravaged business—one of the first steps toward recovery—can be a difficult and disheartening task. It can also be dangerous. Before you can even enter your property to assess the damage and begin clean-up and repair, you must take steps to protect the health—indeed, the lives—of workers and volunteers who have come to help.

### ***Before Entering A Flood-Damaged Building***

- Remember that buildings that have been submerged or have withstood rushing flood waters may have suffered structural damage and could be dangerous.
- Before entering a building, check for structural damage. Don't go in if there is any chance that the building, or parts of it, may collapse. If you see damage, have a qualified person check the building before you enter.
- Never assume that water-damaged structures or ground are stable.
- Assume that all stairs, floors, and roofs, and overhangs are unsafe until they are inspected.

### ***When You Enter A Flood-Damaged Building***

- Once you are certain that the building is safe to enter, make sure the electricity is turned off at the meter or at the street before you enter. Determine that all electrical hazards are controlled.
- Enter the building carefully. Leave immediately if shifting or unusual noises signal a possible collapse.
- If the door sticks at the top, it could mean your ceiling is ready to fall. If you force the door open, wait outside the doorway in case debris falls.
- Check the ceiling for signs of sagging. Wind, rain, or deep flooding may wet plaster or wallboard. It is very heavy, and will be dangerous if it falls.
- Upon entering the building, do not use matches, cigarette lighters, or any other open flames, since gas may be trapped inside. Use an explosion-proof flashlight or chemical light stick to light your way.
- If you suspect a gas leak or smell gas, or if you hear blowing or hissing, open a window and leave the building and premises *immediately*. Call the gas company from a different location. Do not re-enter the building.
- Be aware of the possibility of electrical shock and the possibility of injuries caused by hidden sharp objects.
- Look out for animals, especially snakes. Displaced animals may seek shelter in your building. Seek the assistance of an animal control officer to remove unwanted animals.

### ***Ensure Electrical Safety to Prevent Electrocutation***

- Turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel (if you can reach these without stepping in water; otherwise, have your utility company disconnect the power at the meter. Take this important step even if the power is off in your community.
- Do not turn the power back on until electrical equipment has been inspected by a qualified electrician.
- Shut off the water.
- Never touch electrical equipment if the ground is wet, unless you are absolutely certain that the power is off.
- Stay well away from downed power lines and electrical wires, and report these to the proper authorities. Electrocutation is a major source of deaths in floods. Electric current passes easily through water and soil. You can be electrocuted even if you only approach a downed power line.
- Look for electrical system damage: sparks, broken or frayed wires, smell of burning insulation.
- Do not energize equipment that is, or has been, wet, until it has been properly dried, cleaned, repaired or restored, and inspected.

### ***Take Steps to Prevent Fires***

- Shut off gas at the main valve, if you are trained to do so; otherwise, have your gas company do this.
- Inspect storage and piping systems containing flammable liquids; repair leaks or damage as soon as possible. Provide supports and anchors for damaged or floating tanks and piping.
- Prohibit smoking. Post a fire watch until all fire protection systems are functional and normal operations are resumed.

### ***Be Cautious About Hazardous Materials***

Flood waters can dislodge tanks, drums, pipes, and equipment, which may contain hazardous materials such as pesticides, chemicals, or fuels.

- Do not attempt to move unidentified dislodged containers without first contacting the local fire department or hazardous materials team.
- If you are working in potentially contaminated areas, wear appropriate protective clothing and respirators.
- Thoroughly wash all clothing and parts of your body that may have come in contact with sewage or other contaminants or with hazardous substances or chemicals. Use soap and clean water. Use waterless sanitizers if uncontaminated water is not available.

### ***Be Cautious About Contaminated Floodwaters***

Floodwaters are often contaminated with biohazards (sewage, medical waste, animal waste and carcasses) or other hazardous materials (fuels, asbestos, farm chemicals, etc.). Flood-damaged buildings may also have damp areas where molds, mildews, and other organisms thrive.

- Assume that anything touched by floodwater is contaminated.
- Use appropriate personal protective equipment, including goggles, respirators, gloves, etc., if you must come in contact with flood waters.
- Make sure that all workers have current tetanus shots.

### ***Secure the Property***

- Post security guards to monitor your property and facilities, since alarm systems may not be functioning, and since buildings may have to be left open during salvage and restoration.
- Provide guards with names of staff or contractors who have permission to be at the site.

### ***Document the Damage***

- Once it is safe to enter the building, make a preliminary tour of all affected areas. Wear protective clothing.
- Do not move equipment or other objects without documenting their location and condition.

- Use a Polaroid-type camera or video camera to record conditions of structure, equipment, and furnishings. Make sure images clearly record the damage. Supplement these with better quality photos when necessary.
- Make notes and voice recordings to accompany the photographs.
- Assign staff to keep written records of contacts with insurance agents and other investigators, staff decisions on retrieval and salvage, and costs associated with clean-up and salvage.
- Make visual, written, and voice records for each step of salvage procedures.

### ***Getting Around Safely***

- Emergency workers will be assisting people in flooded areas. You can help them by staying off the roads and out of the way. Keep listening to the radio for news about what to do, where to go, or places to avoid.
- Roads may still be closed because they have been damaged or are covered by water. Floodwaters often erode roads and walkways. Barricades have been placed for your protection. If you come upon a barricade or a flooded road, turn around and go another way. Don't try to assess the depth of the water on a road. If the road is covered, *don't cross it*. Don't drive over low-water bridges.
- If your vehicle stalls, get away from it and get to higher ground. A car will float in as little as two feet of water. More people drown in their cars than anywhere else.
- Remember that standing water may be electrically charged from underground or downed power lines.
- Be careful walking around. Flooding may have caused familiar places to change, and steps and floors are often slippery with mud.
- Do not walk through flooded areas. As little as six inches of moving water can knock you off your feet.
- Stay away from areas subject to additional flooding, such as low areas, stream beds, and ditches.
- Stay on firm ground.
- Be especially careful at night or in dark conditions when it is harder to see flood dangers.
- Flooded areas can be covered with debris, including nails and broken glass. Flood waters and debris may hide live animals or animal carcasses, and flood waters are often contaminated with biohazards (sewage, medical waste, animal waste and carcasses) or other hazardous materials (fuels, asbestos, farm chemicals, etc.). Wear appropriate personal protective equipment if you must come in contact with flood waters.
- To reduce the risk of drowning; avoid working alone, and wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket when you are working in or near flood waters.

### ***Sources of Information and Assistance***

American Red Cross ([www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org))  
 Environmental Protection Agency ([www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov))  
 Federal Emergency Management Agency ([www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov))  
 National Electrical Manufacturers Association ([www.nema.org](http://www.nema.org))  
 National Institutes for Occupational Safety and Health ([www.cdc.gov/niosh/flood.html](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/flood.html))  
 Occupational Safety and Health Administration ([www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov))  
 Public Risk Management Association ([www.primacentral.org](http://www.primacentral.org))

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