

Returning Home After a Flood

January 14, 2017

Flood dangers do not end when the water begins to recede. Only return home if it is safe to do so. When returning home, do not attempt to drive through water on the road. Even water that looks shallow can stall or wash your car off the road. For a list of road closures visit <http://www.sacdot.com/closures/pages/default.aspx>.

Returning Home After a Flood

- When entering buildings, use extreme caution. Building damage may have occurred where you least expect it. Watch carefully every step you take.
- Floodwater can be contaminated and be a health safety issue. Wear sturdy rubber boots. The most common injury following a disaster is cut feet
- Examine walls, floors, doors, staircases, and windows to make sure that the building is not in danger of collapsing and watch for loose plaster, drywall, and ceilings that could fall.
- Inspect foundations for cracks or other damage.
- Watch out for animals and snakes that may have come into buildings with the flood waters.
- Flood Clean Up - Flood waters can often contain sewage. Keep children and pets out and wear rubber boots, rubber gloves, and goggles to remove contaminated items and to clean. Remove and discard drywall/insulation and all items that cannot be washed and disinfected. Thoroughly clean all hard surfaces with hot water and laundry or dish detergent. After completing the cleanup, wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled for one minute then cooled or use a solution of 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon of household bleach per one gallon of water and let it stand for 30 minutes before use. Wash clothes worn during the cleanup alone in hot water and detergent.

Utilities

- There may be broken or leaking gas lines, flooded electrical circuits, or submerged furnaces or electrical appliances. Flammable or explosive materials may travel from upstream. Fire is the most frequent hazard following floods.
- Try to return to your home during the daytime so that you do not have to use any lights. Use battery-powered lanterns or flashlights when examining buildings.
- Check for gas leaks. If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional
- Look for electrical system damage. If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell burning insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice. Electrical equipment should be checked and dried before being returned to service.

Floodwater-Contaminated Septic Systems, Water Wells and Small Water Systems

Some residences and businesses use private septic systems, water wells and other small water systems that can be contaminated by floodwater.

If you suspect that your septic, water well or small water system has been compromised by floodwater, it is important for health reasons that you take the following precautions:

Water wells and small water systems:

- Do not use or drink flood-contaminated well water.
- Have your water tested by certified well water testers.
- Disinfect the water well system with bleach
 - Water wells that have been flooded must be thoroughly disinfected prior to use. 1.) Pump well water until clear. 2.) Unscrew plug in the well cap and pour one gallon of household bleach directly into the well and wash down the casing, and plumbing with chlorinated water. 3.) Pump the chlorinated water through the entire system by opening every faucet (inside and outside) until a chlorine smell can be detected. 4.) Shut off all faucets and allow water to stand in the system overnight. 5.) The next morning, drain all inside lines and continue to pump from an outside faucet until water is free of chlorine odor.
- Avoid contact with any electrical that could have been flooded until it is dry.

Septic Systems

- Do not use the septic system until floodwater has drained lower than the tank.
- Avoid contact with any electrical that could have been flooded until it is dry.
- If you suspect damage, have the septic tank inspected by a licensed contractor.

If you have questions regarding septic systems and water wells that have been exposed to floodwater, contact the Sacramento County Environmental Compliance Division, 916-875-8400.

Food

- Do not eat any food that may have come in contact with floodwater.
- Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance it may have come in contact with floodwater. Food containers that are not waterproof include those with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops, and crimped caps.
- Undamaged canned food can be saved: Remove labels and wash with soap & water and rinse with clean water; Then, sanitize by immersing in boiling water for 2 minutes or in 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water for 15 minutes; Allow at least 1 hour to air-dry before opening.
- Discard cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes and home canned foods if they have come in contact with floodwaters. They cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized.
- Inspect canned foods; discard any food in damaged cans. Canned food damage is shown by swelling, leakage, punctures, holes, fractures, extensive deep rusting, or crushing/denting severe enough to prevent normal stacking or opening with a manual, wheel-type can opener.
- Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples, and pacifiers that may have come in contact with floodwaters. There is no way to safely clean them.
- If your refrigerator or freezer was submerged by floodwaters — even partially — it is unsafe to use and must be discarded
- Do not eat refrigerated foods that have been at temperatures over 41°F for more than 4 hours.

Mold

- After a flood, excess moisture and standing water can contribute to the growth of mold in homes and other buildings. When returning to a home that has been flooded, be aware that mold may be present and may be a health risk for your family.
- You may recognize mold by: Sight - Are the walls and ceiling discolored, or do they show signs of mold growth or water damage? Smell - Do you smell a bad odor, such as a musty, earthy smell or a foul stench?
- Clean up and dry out the building quickly (within 24 to 48 hours). Open doors and windows. Use fans to dry out the building.
- When in doubt, take it out! Remove all porous items that have been wet for more than 48 hours and that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried. These items can remain a source of mold growth and should be removed from the home. Porous, non-cleanable items include carpeting and carpet padding, upholstery, wallpaper, drywall, floor and ceiling tiles, insulation material, some clothing, leather, paper, wood, and food.
- Have your home heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) system checked and cleaned by a maintenance or service professional who is experienced in mold clean-up before you turn it on.

Retrieving a Stranded Vehicle after a Flood

- Once the water has receded and the vehicle can be safely accessed, hire a tow truck company to remove the vehicle.
- If your car has been towed, contact CHP Dispatch, 916-861-1300 for information on which tow company has the vehicle.

Additional Information and Resources

- Sacramento Office of Emergency Services: www.sacoes.org
- Sacramento County Environmental Management Department: www.emd.saccounty.net/DisasterResponse/Pages/ConsumerDisaster.aspx
- Sacramento Ready: www.sacramentoready.org