Hurricanes, Dangers Left Behind

Protecting your health and safety are just as important after a hurricane as during a hurricane. Hurricanes leave a number of dangers behind. Here are some tips for preventing illness, injury, and death after a hurricane.

KNOWING WHERE AND WHEN IT'S SAFE:

- Continue to monitor your radio or television for up-to-date emergency information.
- Find out what roads, areas, and buildings are safe to return to. You can get this information from public announcements or the authorities.
- Avoid moving water, regardless of depth or speed. Do not drive through flooded roads. Cars can be swept away or break down.

FOOD AND WATER SAFETY

Food and tap water may not be safe to eat or drink after a hurricane or flood. Safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene includes bottled, boiled, or treated water. Your state or local health department can make specific recommendations for boiling or treating water in your area. Here are some general rules concerning water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene. Remember:

- Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula. If possible, use baby formula that does not need to have water added. You can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to wash your hands.
- If you use bottled water, be sure it came from a safe source. If you do not know that the water came from a safe source, you should boil or treat it before using it. Use only bottled, boiled, or treated water until your supply is tested and found to be safe.
- Boiling water, when practical, is the preferred way to kill harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute will kill most organisms.
- When boiling water is not practical, you can treat water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or unscented household chlorine bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite):
  - If you use chlorine tablets or iodine tablets, follow the directions that come with the tablets.
  - If you use household chlorine bleach, add 1/8 teaspoon (~0.75 mL) of bleach per gallon of water if the water is clear. For cloudy water, add 1/4 teaspoon (~1.50 mL) of bleach per gallon. Mix the solution thoroughly and let it stand for about 30 minutes before using it.

Note: Treating water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or liquid bleach will not kill parasitic organisms. Use a bleach solution to rinse water containers before reusing them. Use water storage tanks and other types of containers with caution. For example, fire truck storage tanks and previously used cans or bottles may be contaminated with microbes or chemicals. Do not rely on untested devices for decontaminating water.

BUILDING SAFETY

Buildings may no longer be safe following a hurricane or flood. There are a number of dangers that you need to be aware of as you return to and begin cleaning up your home or other buildings. In general, return to buildings during the daytime so that you do not have to use any lights. Be aware of possible structural, electrical, or gas-leak hazards.

UTILITY HAZARDS

- Before entering a building, make sure the main electrical switch is off. Shut off electrical power and natural gas or propane tanks to avoid fire, electrocution, or explosions.
- Make sure that all electrical equipment and appliances are completely dry before you use them.
- Stay away from downed power lines. Notify the power company immediately if you find some.
- If you suspect a gas leak, leave the building immediately and notify the gas company. Do not do anything that could cause a spark, such as turn on lights, light matches, or smoke.
- Report utility damage to the authorities.

FIRE HAZARDS

- Use battery powered lanterns and flashlights, if possible, instead of candles. If you use candles, make sure you put them in safe holders away from curtains, paper, wood, or other flammable items.

CARBON MONOXIDE HAZARD

Carbon monoxide gas can kill you. But you cannot see or smell it. Some machines used for cleanup put off carbon monoxide gas. Follow these tips to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.

- Place portable power generators outside of your home or other buildings and away from any air intake vents.
- Place gasoline powered pressure washers outside the building in well-ventilated areas.

DANGEROUS MATERIALS

- Be aware that hurricanes and flood waters may damage, move, or bury dangerous materials and chemicals.
- Call the fire department to inspect or remove chemicals and other dangerous materials.
- Call the fire department to remove propane tanks. Propane tanks can catch on fire or explode.
- Wear insulated gloves and use caution if you have to remove a car battery. Car batteries can maintain an electrical charge even if flooded.

CLEANUP

To prevent illness, disinfect and dry buildings and items in them. This will prevent growth of some bacteria, viruses, mold, and mildew that can cause illness.

- Clean walls, floors, and counter surfaces with soap and water. Disinfect them with a solution of 1 cup bleach to 5 gallons of water.
- Wash all clothes and linens in hot water. Air dry and spray all unwashable items (for example, mattresses, furniture) with a disinfectant. Steam clean carpets. Throw away all items touched by water that can not be disinfected.

ANIMALS AND MOSQUITOES

- Be cautious of wild or stray animals. Wild or stray animals may be dazed or confused and dangerous following a hurricane or flood.
- Snakes may be hiding in unusual places after flooding. Be cautious. If you are bitten, try to identify the snake so that if it is poisonous, you can be given the correct anti-venom. Do not cut the wound or attempt to suck the venom out.
- Secure all food sources and remove any animal carcasses to avoid attracting rats.
- Wear insect repellant when outdoors. Flooding may lead to more mosquitoes which can carry disease.

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