

Returning Home

<http://www.ready.gov/returning-home>

Returning home can be both physically and mentally challenging. Above all, use caution. You may be anxious to see your property but do not return to your home before the area is declared to be safe by local officials.

Before You Enter Your Home

Inspect your home carefully before entering.

Walk carefully around the outside and check for loose power lines, gas leaks and structural damage. If you have any doubts about safety, have your residence inspected by a qualified building inspector or structural engineer before entering.

- Keep a battery-powered radio with you so you can listen for emergency updates and news reports.
- Use a battery-powered flash light to inspect a damaged home.
Note: The flashlight should be turned on outside before entering - the battery may produce a spark that could ignite leaking gas, if present.
- Watch out for animals, especially poisonous snakes. Use a stick to poke through debris.
- Use the phone only to report life-threatening emergencies.
- As you return home, watch for fallen objects; downed electrical wires; and weakened walls, bridges, roads and sidewalks.

Do not enter if:

- You smell gas.
- Floodwaters remain around the building.
- Your home was damaged by fire and the authorities have not declared it safe.

When You Enter Your Home

Be cautious when entering your home after a disaster.

When you go inside your home, there are certain things you should and should not do. Enter the home carefully and check for damage. Be aware of loose boards and slippery floors. The following items are other things to check inside your home:

- Natural gas. If you smell gas or hear a hissing or blowing sound, open a window and leave immediately. Turn off the main gas valve from the outside, if you can. Call the gas company from a neighbor's residence. If you shut off the gas supply at the main valve, you will need a professional to turn it back on. Do not smoke or

use oil, gas lanterns, candles or torches for lighting inside a damaged home until you are sure there is no leaking gas or other flammable materials present.

- Sparks, broken or frayed wires. Check the electrical system unless you are wet, standing in water or unsure of your safety. If possible, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If the situation is unsafe, leave the building and call for help. Do not turn on the lights until you are sure they're safe to use. You may want to have an electrician inspect your wiring.
- Roof, foundation and chimney cracks. If it looks like the building may collapse, leave immediately.
- Appliances. If appliances are wet, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. Then, unplug appliances and let them dry out. Have appliances checked by a professional before using them again. Also, have the electrical system checked by an electrician before turning the power back on.
- Water and sewage systems. If pipes are damaged, turn off the main water valve. Check with local authorities before using any water; the water could be contaminated. Pump out wells and have the water tested by authorities before drinking. Do not flush toilets until you know that sewage lines are intact.
- Food and other supplies. Throw out all food and other supplies that you suspect may have become contaminated or come in to contact with floodwater.
- Your basement. If your basement has flooded, pump it out gradually (about one third of the water per day) to avoid damage. The walls may collapse and the floor may buckle if the basement is pumped out while the surrounding ground is still waterlogged.
- Open cabinets. Be alert for objects that may fall.
- Clean up household chemical spills. Disinfect items that may have been contaminated by raw sewage, bacteria, or chemicals. Also clean salvageable items.
- Call your insurance agent. Take pictures of damages. Keep good records of repair and cleaning costs.

Be wary of wildlife as you return home after a disaster.

Disaster and life threatening situations will exacerbate the unpredictable nature of wild animals. To protect yourself and your family, learn how to deal with wildlife.

Guidelines

- Do not corner wild animals or try to rescue them. Wild animals will likely feel threatened and may endanger themselves by dashing off into floodwaters, fire, and so forth. Call your local animal control office or wildlife resource office.
- Wild animals often seek higher ground which, during floods, eventually become submerged (i.e., island) and the animals become stranded. If the island is large enough and provides suitable shelter, you can leave food appropriate to the species (i.e., sunflower seeds for squirrels). Animals have a flight response and will flee from anyone approaching too closely. If the animal threatens to rush into

the water, back away from the island or you may frighten the animal into jumping into the water to escape from you.

- Do not approach wild animals that have taken refuge in your home. Wild animals such as snakes, opossums and raccoons often seek refuge from floodwaters on upper levels of homes and have been known to remain after water recedes. If you encounter animals in this situation, open a window or provide another escape route and the animal will likely leave on its own. Do not attempt to capture or handle the animal. Should the animal stay, call your local animal control office or wildlife resource office.
- Beware of an increased number of snakes and other predators. These animals will try to feed on the carcasses of reptiles, amphibians and small mammals who have been drowned or crushed in their burrows or under rocks.
- Do not attempt to move a dead animal. Animal carcasses can present serious health risks. Outbreaks of anthrax, encephalitis and other diseases may occur. [Contact your local emergency management office](#) or health department for help and instructions.
- If bitten by an animal, seek immediate medical attention.