

Article Part 2 – Staying Safe After the Storm

Tuesday June 15th 2010

Citrus County Health Department

Returning home after the storm can be challenging and your health and safety are a number one priority. What are the things you need to be concerned about? What are some of the potential dangers waiting at home? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes the potential dangers that may be waiting for you as well as the precautions you can take.

First, do not enter your home if you smell gas. Do not light a match or turn on lights. Call 911. Turn off the electrical power at the main source if there is standing water. Wear rubber boots and gloves to protect your skin from any floodwater. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand-cleaning gel. Remember any cut

Prevent illness from FOOD

Identify and throw away food that may not be safe to eat. Throw away the following:

- Food that may have come in contact with flood or storm water
- Canned foods that are bulging, opened, or damaged
- Food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture
- Perishable foods (including meat, poultry, fish, eggs and leftovers) that have been above 40°F for 2 hours or more.
- When in doubt throw it out!

Thawed food that contains ice crystals or is 40°F or below can be refrozen or cooked. If cans have come in contact with floodwater or storm water, remove the labels, wash the cans, and dip them in a solution of 1 cup (240 milliliters) of bleach in 5 gallons of water. Re-label the cans with a marker.

Store food safely. While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. Add block ice or dry ice to your refrigerator if the electricity is expected to be off longer than 4 hours. Wear heavy gloves when handling ice.

Prevent illness from WATER

Listen to and follow public announcements. Local authorities will tell you if tap water is safe to drink or to use for cooking, cleaning or bathing. If the water is not safe to use, follow local instructions to use bottled water or boil or disinfected water.

Correctly boil or disinfect water. Hold water at a rolling boil for 1 minute to kill bacteria. If you can't boil water, add 1/8 teaspoon (approximately 0.75 mL) of newly purchased, unscented liquid household bleach per gallon of water. Stir the water well, and let it stand for 30 minutes before you use it. You can use water-purifying tablets instead of boiling water or using bleach. For infants, use **only** pre-prepared canned baby formula. Do not use powdered formulas prepared with treated water. Clean children's toys that have come in contact with water. Use a solution of 1 cup of bleach in 5 gallons of water to clean the toys. Let toys air dry after cleaning.

Avoid floodwater and mosquitoes. Follow all warnings about water on roadways. Do not drive vehicles or heavy equipment through water. If you have to work in or near floodwater, wear a life jacket. If you are caught in an area where floodwater is rising, wear a life jacket, or use some

other type of flotation device. Prevent mosquito bites by wearing long pants, socks, and long-sleeved shirts and by using insect repellents that contain DEET or Picaridin.

Prevent and treat OTHER ILLNESS and INJURIES

Prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon Monoxide is a poison gas that you cannot see, smell or taste. Common sources of CO in and around the home are barbeque grills, gas generators, automobile exhaust and gas or wood burning fireplaces. Symptoms of CO poisoning are nausea, vomiting, difficulty breathing, sleepiness and confusion.

Never use a generator, pressure washer, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline- or charcoal-burning device inside your home, basement, garage or near an open window, door, or vent. Don't run a car or truck inside a garage attached to your house, even if you leave the door open. Don't heat your house with a gas oven. If your carbon monoxide detector sounds, or you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, leave your home immediately and call 911

Clean up and prevent mold growth. Clean up and dry out the building quickly (within 24 to 48 hours). Open doors and windows. Use fans to dry out the building. To *prevent* mold growth, clean wet items and surfaces with detergent and water. To *remove* mold growth, wear rubber gloves, open windows and doors, and clean with a solution of 1 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water. Throw away porous items (for example, carpet and upholstered furniture) that cannot be dried quickly. Fix any leaks in roofs, walls, or plumbing.

Pace yourself and get support. Be alert to physical and emotional exhaustion or strain. Set priorities for cleanup tasks, and pace the work. Try not to work alone. Don't get exhausted. Ask family or friends for help. If needed, seek professional help.

Prevent musculoskeletal injuries. Use teams of two or more people to move bulky objects. Avoid lifting any material that weighs more than 50 pounds (per person). Do not use an electric tool or appliance while standing in water.

Stay cool. When it's hot, stay in air-conditioned buildings; take breaks in shaded areas or in cool rooms; drink water and nonalcoholic fluids often; wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing; and do outdoor activities during cooler hours.

Treat wounds. Clean out all open wounds and cuts with soap and clean water. Apply an antibiotic ointment. Contact a doctor to find out whether more treatment is needed. If you have a puncture wound and haven't had a Tetanus shot in 5 years you may need one. If a wound gets red, swells, or drains, seek immediate medical attention.

Wash your hands. Use soap and water to wash your hands. If water isn't available, you can use alcohol-based products made for washing hands.

Wear protective gear for cleanup work. Wear hard hats, goggles, heavy work gloves, and watertight boots with steel toes and insoles (not just steel shank). Wear earplugs or protective headphones to reduce risk from equipment noise.

For more information on health related matters visit our web site at: www.citruscountyhealth.org. For hurricane information click the disaster tab.