



News Release

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PREVENT INJURIES AFTER HURRICANE IRENE

(RICHMOND, Va.)— After the wind and waters recede, people in the areas affected by Hurricane Irene will continue to face a number of hazards associated with cleanup activities. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) offers these tips to stay safe following a natural disaster:

Food Safety Precautions

- Perishable foods including meats, dairy products and eggs that haven't been refrigerated for more than two hours should be discarded because they are no longer safe to consume.
- Foods that have been contaminated by flooding should also be discarded.
- Be particularly careful to thoroughly disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with food, such as counter tops, pantry shelves, pots and pans, dishes and inside refrigerators, etc.

Wear Protective Gear

- For most work in flooded areas, wear hard hats, goggles, heavy work gloves and watertight boots with steel toe and insole (not just steel shank).
- Wear earplugs or protective headphones to reduce risk from equipment noise. Equipment such as chain saws, backhoes and dryers may cause ringing in the ears and subsequent hearing damage.
- Wear eye goggles while removing or cleaning up debris to prevent eye injuries.

Beware of Electrical Hazards

- If water has been present anywhere near electrical circuits and electrical equipment, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel. Do not turn the power back on until electrical equipment has been inspected by a

qualified electrician.

- Never enter flooded areas or touch electrical equipment if the ground is wet, unless you are certain that the power is off.
- Never touch a downed power line.
- When using gasoline and diesel generators, switch the main breaker or fuse on the service panel to the off position prior to starting the generator.

Avoid Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that is poisonous to breathe. During flood cleanup, operate all gasoline-powered devices such as pumps, generators and pressure washers outdoors and never bring them indoors.

Prevent Muscle and Bone Injury

Special attention is needed to avoid back injuries associated with manual lifting and handling of debris and building materials.

To help prevent muscle and bone injury:

- Use teams of two or more to move bulky objects.
- Avoid lifting any material that weighs more than 50 pounds.
- Use proper automated-assist lifting devices.
- Use caution or seek professional assistance when removing fallen trees, cleaning up debris or using equipment, such as chain saws.
- Wear eye goggles while removing or cleaning up debris to prevent eye injuries.

Beware of Structural Instability

Never assume that water-damaged structures or ground are stable. Buildings that have been submerged or have withstood rushing flood waters may have suffered structural damage and could be dangerous.

- Don't work in or around any flood-damaged building until it has been examined and certified as safe for work by a registered professional engineer or architect.
- Assume all stairs, floors and roofs are unsafe until they are inspected.
- Leave immediately if shifting or unusual noises signal a possible collapse.

Avoid Hazardous Materials

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

- Do not attempt to move unidentified dislodged containers without first contacting the local fire department or hazardous materials team.
- If working in potentially contaminated areas, avoid skin contact or inhalation of vapors by wearing appropriate protective clothing and respirators.
- Frequently and thoroughly wash skin that may have been exposed to pesticides and other hazardous chemicals.

Candle Safety

- Use a flashlight instead of a candle whenever possible.
- Extinguish all candles when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- Keep candles away from items that can catch fire such as clothing, books, curtains, or flammable liquids.
- Use candle holders that are sturdy, won't tip over easily and are made from a material that can't burn.
- Keep candles out of reach of children.
- Try to avoid carrying a lit candle.
- Never use a candle for a light when checking pilot lights or fueling equipment.

Prevent Fatigue-Related Injuries

Continued long hours of work combined with exhaustion can create a highly stressful situation during cleanup. People working on hurricane and flood cleanup can reduce their risk of injury and illness in several ways:

- Set priorities for cleanup tasks and pace the work.
- Avoid physical exhaustion.
- Resume a normal sleep schedule as quickly as possible.
- Be alert to emotional exhaustion or strain.
- Consult family members, friends or professionals for emotional support.

For more information about how to protect yourself and your family before, during and after natural disasters, visit www.vdh.virginia.gov or the Virginia Department of Emergency Management's Web site at www.vaemergency.gov.