Flooding

There are a number of severe weather hazards that affect Illinois, including thunderstorms, tornadoes, lightning, floods and flash floods, damaging winds and large hail. Severe weather hazards can cause extensive property damage, injury or death. Below you will find some helpful tips on how to deal with Flood waters, including re-entering your flooded home.

- **Flooding is the number one severe weather killer nationwide.**
- Nationally, 75% of presidential disaster declarations are the result of floods.
- **The most dangerous type of flooding is a flash flood.** Flash floods can sweep away everyone and everything in their path.
- Most flash floods are caused by slow-moving thunderstorms, and occur most frequently at night.
- Nineteen people in Illinois have died from floods since 1995. Most of the fatalities involved people in vehicles trying to cross a flooded roadway.

Know the terms used to describe flood threats:

Flood Watch — *Flooding or flash flooding is possible.* Be prepared to move to higher ground. Listen to NOAA Weather Radio, commercial radio or commercial television for additional information.

Flood Warning — *Flooding is occurring or will occur soon.* If advised to evacuate, do so immediately.

Flash Flood Warning — *A flash flood is occurring or is imminent.* Move to higher ground immediately. Flash floods develop MUCH quicker than river floods.

Flood Statement — Minor flooding of creeks and streams, streets, low-lying areas or basement flooding is occurring or is imminent.

Before a Flood

- **Know how to shut off electricity, gas and water** at main switches and valves. Know where gas pilots are located and how the heating system works.
- **Consider measures for flood proofing your home.** Call your local building department or emergency management agency (EMA) for information.
- **Consider purchasing flood insurance.** Flood losses are not covered under homeowners insurance policies. Flood insurance is available in most communities through the National Flood Insurance Program. There is usually a period before it takes effect, so don't delay. Flood insurance is available whether the building is in or out of the identified flood-prone area. Call your insurance company for more information.

NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM

FloodSmart.gov
Know The Risk.

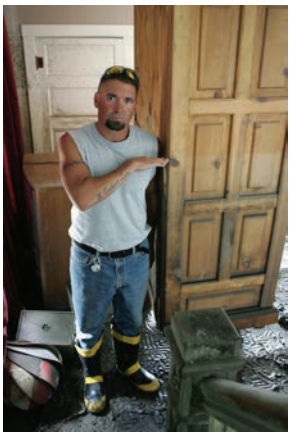
- **Insure your property and possessions.** Make an inventory of your possessions using paper lists, photographs and/or videotapes of your belongings. Leave a copy with your insurance company. Update your inventory and review your coverage with your insurance company periodically.
- **Keep all of your important records and documents in a safe deposit box or another safe place away from the premises.**

During a Flood

- **People lose their lives by attempting to drive over a flooded roadway.** The speed and depth of the water is not always obvious. There may be a hidden portion of the roadway washed out under the water. Two feet of water will carry away most automobiles.
- **Monitor the radio or television** for the latest weather information.
- **Move valuable household possessions to the upper floor** or move to another location if flooding is imminent and time permits.
- **If instructed to do so by local authorities, turn off utilities at their source.**
- **Listen to a battery-operated radio for evacuation instructions.**
- **If advised to evacuate, do so quickly.**
- Evacuation is much simpler and safer before flood waters become too deep for ordinary vehicles to drive through.

After a Flood

- **Do not let children play in or near flood waters, flooded creeks or flood retention ponds.**
- **Stay alert in areas where flood waters have receded.** Roads may have weakened and could collapse under the weight of a vehicle. **NEVER cross a flooded road or bridge in your vehicle!**
- Flood dangers do not end when the water begins to recede. **Listen to a radio or television and don't return home until authorities indicate it is safe to do so.**



- When you are allowed to return, remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance.
- **Inspect foundations for cracks or other damage.** When entering buildings, use extreme caution. If your home was damaged, check the utilities.
- **Look for fire hazards.**
- **Stay out of buildings that remain in the flood waters.**
- **Avoid coming in contact with flood waters.** The water may be contaminated with oil, gasoline or raw sewage. Do not wade through a flooded stream to protect or retrieve belongings.
- **Consider your family's health and safety.** Wash your hands frequently with soap and clean water if you come in contact with flood waters. Listen for news reports to learn whether the community's water supply is safe to drink.
- Throw away food — including canned goods — that has come in contact with flood waters.
- **Pump out flooded basements gradually** (about one-third of the water per day) **to avoid structural damage.**
- **Service damaged septic tanks, cesspools, pits and leaching systems** as soon as possible. Damaged sewer systems pose a health hazard.
- If unaffected by the flood, stay out of the area until you are permitted by local officials. Your presence may hamper emergency operations.
- **Monitor the radio for special information about where to go to get assistance for housing, clothing and food.** Other programs are available to help you cope with the stress of the situation.
- **Take photos or video of the damage to your home and your belongings.**

Re-entering Your Flooded House

When returning to a home that's been flooded after natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods, be aware that your house may be contaminated with mold or sewage, which can cause health risks for your family.

When You First Re-enter Your Home

- If you have standing water in your home and can turn off the main power from a dry location, then go ahead and turn off the power, even if it delays cleaning. If you must enter standing water to access the main power switch, then call an electrician to turn it off. **NEVER turn power on or off yourself or use an electric tool or appliance while standing in water.**
- Have an electrician check the house's electrical system before turning the power on again.
- If the house has been closed up for several days, enter briefly to open doors and windows to let the house air out for awhile (at least 30 minutes) before you stay for any length of time.
- If your home has been flooded and has been closed up for several days, presume your home has been contaminated with mold. (See Protect Yourself from Mold.)
- If your home has been flooded, it also may be contaminated with sewage. (See After a Hurricane or Flood: Cleanup of Flood Water.)

Dry Out Your House

If flood or storm water has entered your home, dry it out as soon as possible. Follow these steps:

- If you have electricity and an electrician has determined that it's safe to turn it on, use a "wet-dry" shop vacuum (or the vacuum function of a carpet steam cleaner), an electric-powered water transfer pump, or sump pump to remove standing water. If you are operating equipment in wet areas, be sure to wear rubber boots.
- If you do not have electricity, or it is not safe to turn it on, you can use a portable generator to power equipment to remove standing water. **Note: If you must use a gasoline-powered pump, generator, pressure washer, or any other gasoline-powered tools to clean your home, never operate the gasoline engine inside a home, basement, garage, carport, porch, or other enclosed or partially enclosed structures, even if the windows and doors are open. Such improper use can create dangerously high levels of carbon monoxide and cause carbon monoxide poisoning.**
- If weather permits, open windows and doors of the house to aid in the drying-out process.
- Use fans and dehumidifiers to remove excess moisture. Fans should be placed at a window or door to blow the air outwards rather than inwards, so not to spread the mold.
- **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.** If the HVAC system was flooded with water, turning on the mold-contaminated HVAC will spread mold throughout the house. Professional cleaning will kill the mold and prevent later mold growth. When the service determines that your system is clean and if it is safe to do so, you can turn it on and use it to help remove excess moisture from your home.
- Prevent water outdoors from reentering your home. For example, rain water from gutters or the roof should drain away from the house; the ground around the house should slope away from the house to keep basements and crawl spaces dry.
- Ensure that crawl spaces in basements have proper drainage to limit water seepage. Ventilate to allow the area to dry out.

Links for more information:

Websites:

- ***IDPH Flood Information***
- ***FEMA Flood Information***
- ***EPA Flood Information***
- ***CDC Flood Information***
- ***American Red Cross Flood Information***

Brochures/Booklets:

- ***After the Flood***, Illinois Department of Public Health