



Safety Precautions When Returning Home

If your area is under a curfew, allow travel time to and from your home. Although unusual following a hurricane, crime can also increase. If your area is under martial law, obey all orders by authorities because they will be armed.

During a hurricane and in the cleanup, injuries occur. To avoid injury, use common sense and wear proper clothing, including clothes with long sleeves and long pants, and safety shoes or boots.

When returning to your home after a hurricane:

- find out if the authorities have declared the area safe;
- watch for debris on the road while driving;
- return to your pre-determined assembly point and/or contact your pre-established out-of-area contact person. Make sure all family members have been accounted for and let others know of your status;
- make sure the main electrical switch to your home is off before entering the structure;
- be careful when entering a structure that has been damaged;
- if you suspect a gas leak, leave immediately and notify the gas company;
- if possible, listen to the radio or contact authorities to find out if sewage lines are intact before turning on the water or using the toilet;
- report utility damage to the proper authorities;
- continue to monitor your radio or television for up-to-date emergency information.

Inspecting the Damage

Upon returning to dwellings evacuated before the hurricane's arrival, be aware of possible structural, electrical, or gas-leak hazards. Electrical power and natural gas or propane tanks should be shut off to avoid fire, electrocution, or explosions. Try to return to your home during the daytime so that you do not have to use any lights. Use battery-powered flashlights and lanterns, rather than candles, gas lanterns, or torches.

Gas Leaks

If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open all windows, and leave the house immediately. Notify the gas company, the police, fire departments, or State Fire Marshal's office, and do not turn on the lights, light matches, smoke, or do anything that could cause a spark. Do not return to the house until you are told it is safe to do so.

Electrical Damage

Your electrical system may have been damaged. If you see frayed wiring or sparks when you restore power, or if there is an odor of something burning but no visible fire, you should immediately shut off the electrical system at the main circuit breaker.

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You should consult your utility company about using electrical equipment, including power generators. Be aware that it is against the law and a violation of electrical codes to connect generators to your home's electrical circuits without the approved, automatic-interrupt devices. If a generator is on line when electrical service is restored, it can become a major fire hazard. In addition, the improper connection of a generator to your home's electrical circuits may endanger line workers helping to restore power in your area.

All electrical equipment and appliances must be completely dry before returning them to service. It is advisable to have a certified electrician check these items if there is any question.

PLEASE NOTE: Several deaths following past hurricanes have occurred due to fires. In many cases, fires were caused by the careless use of candles to light homes without electrical power. Use battery-powered lanterns, if possible, rather than candles. If you use candles, make sure they are in safe holders away from curtains, paper, wood, or other flammable items. Never leave a candle burning when you are out of the room.

Other Injury-Prevention Measures

To avoid other hurricane-related injuries, you should:

- learn proper safety procedures and operating instructions before operating any gas-powered or electric chain saw;
- with an electric chainsaw, use extreme caution to avoid electrical shock;
- when using any power equipment, always wear a safety face shield or eyeglasses, and gloves;
- avoid all power lines, particularly those in water;
- avoid wading in water. Broken glass, metal fragments, and other debris may be present in the water; and
- be careful of nails and broken glass when removing boards covering the windows.

Contact your state or local health department or utility company if you need additional safety information.

Cleanup

Once you have established that no structural, electrical, or gas-related hazards exist in your home, dry and disinfect all materials inside the house to prevent the growth of mold and mildew.

Walls, hard-surfaced floors, and many other household surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water and disinfected with a solution of one cup of bleach to five gallons of water. Be particularly careful to thoroughly disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with food, such as counter tops, pantry shelves, refrigerators, etc. Areas where small children play should also be carefully cleaned. Wash all linens and clothing in hot water, or dry clean them. For items that cannot be washed or dry cleaned, such as mattresses and upholstered furniture, air dry them in the sun and then spray them thoroughly with a disinfectant. Steam clean all carpeting. If there has been a backflow of sewage into the house, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Remove and discard contaminated household materials that cannot be disinfected such as wall coverings, cloth, rugs, and drywall.

Other Hazards

Downed Powerlines

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If powerlines are lying on the ground or dangling near the ground, do not touch the lines. Notify your utility company as soon as possible that the lines have been damaged, or that the powerlines are down. Do not attempt to move or repair the powerlines.

Do not drive through standing water if downed powerlines are in the water. If a powerline falls across your car while you are driving, continue to drive away from the line. If the engine stalls, do not turn off the ignition. Stay in your car and wait for emergency personnel. Do not allow anyone other than emergency personnel to approach your vehicle.

Animals

Wild or stray domestic animals can pose a danger during or after the passage of a hurricane. Remember, most animals are disoriented and displaced, too. Do not corner an animal. If an animal must be removed, contact your local animal control authorities.

If you are bitten by any animal, seek immediate medical attention. If you are bitten by a snake, first try to accurately identify the type of snake so that, if poisonous: the correct anti-venom can be administered. Do not cut the wound or attempt to suck the venom out.

Certain animals may carry rabies. Although the virus is rare, care should be taken to avoid contact with stray animals and rodents. Health departments can provide information on the types of animals that carry rabies in your area.

Rats may also be a problem during and after a hurricane. Take care to secure all food supplies, and remove any animal carcasses in the vicinity by contacting your local animal control authorities.

Drowning

Although hurricane winds can cause an enormous amount of damage, wind is not the biggest killer in such a storm. Nine of every ten hurricane fatalities are drownings associated with swiftly moving waters. People who enter moving water with their cars, or who get on boats on lakes or bays when a hurricane strikes the area are at grave risk of drowning, regardless of their ability to swim. Even very shallow water that is moving swiftly can be deadly. Cars or other vehicles do not provide adequate protection. Cars can be swept away or may break down in moving water. Be alert and follow hazard warnings on roadways or those broadcast by the media. Police and public works departments should be contacted for up-to-date information regarding safe roadways.

Chemical Hazards

Be aware of potential chemical hazards you may encounter when returning to your home, especially if the hurricane is accompanied by flooding. Floodwaters and high winds may have moved or buried hazardous chemical containers of solvents or other industrial chemicals. Contact your local fire department about inspecting and removing hazardous chemical containers. Avoid inhaling chemical fumes.

If any propane tanks (whether 20-lb. tanks from a gas grill or household propane tanks) are discovered, do not attempt to move them yourself. These represent a very real danger of fire or explosion, and if any are found, the fire department, police, or your State Fire Marshal's office should be contacted immediately.

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Car batteries, while flooded, may still contain an electrical charge and should be removed with extreme caution by using insulated gloves. Avoid coming in contact with any acid that may have spilled from a damaged car battery.

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.

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 building. In general, return to buildings during the daytime so that you don't have to use any lights and 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 suspect a gas leak, leave 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.

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.

For more information, visit www.bt.cdc.gov, or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY).

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