

There is so much to do when you first return home after a disaster. It can be overwhelming. But if you make a plan, work carefully, and keep yourself safe and healthy, you will make progress. Here are some tips about getting started, along with some possible problems to watch out for.

Before you start

Be sure your home is safe enough for you to work in before you get started.

- Do not enter a damaged building until it has been certified as safe by a building inspector. Leave immediately if you hear or feel the building shifting.
- If you smell gas, notify emergency authorities immediately and do not return home until you are told it is safe.
- If electrical circuits and equipment have gotten wet, turn off the power and get an electrical inspection before you turn the power back on. Don't touch the circuitry at all if you are standing in water!

Taking care of your house

The first things for you to think about as you get started are removing hazardous materials and cleaning up water damage, but watch out for carbon monoxide poisoning!

Prevent carbon monoxide poisoning

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas produced by burning fuel, like gas, oil, kerosene or wood. It can cause sudden illness and death if you breathe too much of it, so take steps to keep it out of your home.

- Never use generators, power washers, grills, camp stoves or other gasoline, propane or charcoal-burning equipment indoors.
- Don't heat your house with a gas oven.
- If your carbon monoxide detector sounds, leave the house immediately and call 911.
- Watch for symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning. If you or others in your house feel dizzy, light headed, or nauseated, get out of the house and seek medical help immediately!

Remove hazardous materials

Chemicals and other dangerous materials may have come into your house or yard during the storm. You may also have to dispose of household chemicals that have been damaged.

- Contact local authorities to inspect or remove chemical drums, propane tanks or other major problems with dangerous materials.
- Don't burn any waste from the cleanup. Take it to an official disposal site.

Clean up water damage

Water-damaged buildings always contain mold, bacteria, and viruses. In some places the water from the storm also carried sewage and chemicals. Any of these can make people sick, especially people who already have breathing problems, children and the elderly. You must act quickly and thoroughly to get rid of problems before they grow.

- Dry out the building as quickly as possible. Open doors and windows.
- If water has been in the building longer than 48 hours or mold growth covers more than 10 square feet, get professional help. Don't try to tackle it alone.
- When in doubt, toss it out! Remove everything that has been soaked by water, including clothing, papers, furnishings, carpet, carpet pad, ceiling tiles, insulation and wallboard. Remember, water can hide inside walls and can soak through brick. Trash anything that can't be thoroughly cleaned and dried.
- If you had floodwater or storm surge damage, get rid of even more. Remove and dispose of drywall or paneling up to 15 to 24 inches ABOVE the water line as well as all wet insulation. Leave the framing lumber, which can be cleaned in place. Remove all floor coverings, including carpet, vinyl, laminate, or tile and hardwood flooring. Water hides between these floorings and

the subfloors, giving mold the perfect place to grow.

- If you have rainwater damage only, scrub hard surfaces like stone, tile and concrete with ordinary detergent and water. Damp mop or wipe up excess water as soon as possible.
- If you have floodwater or storm surge damage, first scrub the hard surfaces carefully with ordinary household detergent and water. Then disinfect by spraying everything thoroughly with undiluted ordinary household 3% hydrogen peroxide. It will kill germs just as well as bleach, and is much safer to use.
- Give the building plenty of time to dry out after the clean up. Use portable fans to help dry out all areas. Don't rush. It may take weeks to fully dry. Rebuilding too soon increases the chance of mold and bacteria growing underneath new carpet or wallboard.

Taking care of your health

You can't get your life back to normal if you let yourself get sick during the clean up period.

Take your medications

If you have a chronic illness like asthma or emphysema, it is very important that you get back to your normal routine of medications. Get medical help if you have lost your medications or can't remember what you are supposed to be taking.

Prevent illness

- Wash your hands often, especially if you are living in crowded conditions or in contact with contaminated water.
- Wear long sleeves and pants to prevent mosquito bites.
- Get a flu shot as soon as possible.

Be aware of breathing problems

After a natural disaster it is not unusual for people to develop lung problems, even if they have never had them before. If you start having breathing problems, don't wait to get medical help. Keep an eye on family members too, especially children and seniors. Some warning signs are:

- Coughing, especially coughing at night
- Wheezing or feeling short of breath
- Chest tightness or pain
- Burning in the nose or throat

CRITICAL SIGNS:

Get emergency medical help if fingernails or lips are turning blue or if there is severe chest pain. Both could be life-threatening.

Where to go for help

Free information sources

American Lung Association HelpLine
1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872)
www.lungusa.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1-800-311-3435

Federal Emergency Management Agency
1-800-621-3362 (TTY: 1-800-462-7585)

Environmental Protection Agency
1-800-438-4318

Mississippi Department of Health
General Information
1-800-HLTHY4U (1-866-458-4948)

Alabama Emergency Management Agency
205-280-2200

Louisiana State Hotline for Human
and Social Services
1-888-LAHELPU (524-3578)

Don't be fooled

People will try to sell you equipment and services to clean up your home. Here are some things to watch out for:

- Don't use machines that generate ozone indoors. Ozone will not remove mold, but it can harm your health.
- Avoid contractors who offer to heat your house and "blow out the mold" with fans. They'll just spread it everywhere.
- Beware of contractors that claim to be EPA certified. There is no such certification.

- Beware of contractors offering to clean your home with an "anti-microbial." The problem requires much more work than just spraying something.

You can go home again—safely!

Three important things to keep in mind when you return home:

1. Make sure it's safe before you begin.
2. Get rid of water damage quickly and thoroughly. When in doubt, toss wet stuff out. Recognize that you may need professional help.
3. Watch for warning signs that your house or the cleanup work may be making you sick. Get medical help if you feel ill.

Beginning our second century, the American Lung Association is the leading organization working to prevent lung disease and promote lung health. Lung disease death rates continue to increase while other major causes of death have declined.

The American Lung Association fights lung disease and promotes lung health through advocacy, research and education. With your generous support, the American Lung Association is "Improving life, one breath at a time."

For more information about the American Lung Association or to support the work we do, call 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872) or log on to www.lungusa.org.

 **AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION®**
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Returning Home After the Hurricane:

Staying Safe and Healthy

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