

RETURNING HOME AFTER A DISASTER

Returning home after a major disaster can be both dangerous and difficult. Be careful entering a disaster area. Before returning to an area that has been evacuated, make sure that local officials have advised it is safe to travel through areas between where you are and home. Be ready to adapt to the conditions at hand. Use the following information as a guide for returning home after disaster strikes...

- Turn on a battery operated radio for emergency information.
- Check for injured or trapped persons and provide first aid, if trained.
- Use telephones only in the case of an emergency.
- Put on heavy shoes for protection against glass or other debris.
- Check food and water supply before using them. Foods that require refrigeration may be spoiled if the electricity was cut off for some time. Do not eat any food that has been in contact with floodwaters.
- Obtain extra food, clothing, medical care or sheltering at American Red Cross Emergency Aid Stations.
- Extinguish all open flames.
- Gas leaks - if not already turned off at the direction of local officials. If you smell gas, turn off the main valve, open the windows and leave the house immediately.
- Check for water leaks - if not already turned off at the direction of local officials. If water leaks are suspected, shut off the water at the main water valve.
- If instructed to do so by local officials, shut off utilities. Always have utilities turned back on by a professional.
- Look for electrical system damage. If there is damage to the electrical system, turn off the system at the main circuit breaker or fuse box.
- Check electrical appliances.
- Investigate buildings. Be careful when entering a damaged building. Stay away from fallen or damaged electrical wires. Use a flashlight to inspect damage. Do not carry lanterns or torches that could start a fire.
- Check the sewage lines are intact before flushing toilets.
- Check house, roof and chimney for structural damage.
- Open closets and cupboards carefully.
- Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, gasoline or other flammable liquids immediately.
- Don't drive unless absolutely necessary.

Checking Electrical Appliances

If any of the electrical appliances are wet, turn off the main power switch in the house. Unplug the appliance, dry it out, then reconnect it and turn the main power switch back on. If fuses blow when the electrical power is restored, turn off the main power switch again and re-inspect for short circuits in the home wiring or appliances. Call a professional, such as an electrician, if you are unsure about doing this.

Pets After a Disaster

The behavior of pets may change dramatically after a disaster. Normally quiet and docile cats and dogs may become loud and vicious. Monitor animals closely. Use a leash or place dogs in a fenced yard.

Life may never return to “normal” for victims of a major disaster. Experiencing a major disaster such as a hurricane can be a traumatic experience that changes people’s lives forever. The American Red Cross is here to help.