

Staying Safe After a Hurricane

Once a hurricane is over, the safety precautions do not stop. If you were required to evacuate your home due to a hurricane, you may find yourself wondering what to do next. Use the following tips to stay safe after the storm passes.

Basic Safety Tips

- Keep listening to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio or local radio or TV stations for instructions.
- If you evacuated, return home when local officials tell you it is safe to do so.
- Inspect your home for damage and contact your insurance agent for assistance. Make sure to check gas, water and electrical lines and appliances for damage.
- Use flashlights in the dark; do not use candles.
- Roads may be closed for your protection. If you come upon a barricade or a flooded road, turn around and go another way. Avoid weakened bridges and washed-out roads. Do not drive into flooded areas.
- Stay on firm ground. Moving water only 6 inches deep can sweep you off your feet. Standing water may be electrically charged from under-ground or downed power lines.
- Do not drink or prepare food with tap water until you are certain it is not contaminated.
- Use the telephone to report life-threatening emergencies only.
- Be especially cautious if using a chainsaw to cut fallen trees.

Safety Tips for a Blackout

Use the following safety tips if you return home only to find yourself in a blackout:

- Only use a flashlight for emergency lighting. Never use candles.
- Turn off electrical equipment you were using when the power went out.
- Avoid opening the refrigerator and freezer.
- Do not run a generator inside a home or garage. If you use a generator, connect the equipment you wish to power directly to the outlets on the generator. Do not connect a generator to a home's electrical system.
- Listen to local radio and television for updated information.

Water Treatment Tips

In addition to having a bad odor and taste, water from questionable sources may be contaminated by a variety of microorganisms, including bacteria and parasites that cause diseases such as dysentery, cholera, typhoid and hepatitis. All water of uncertain purity should be treated before use.

To treat water, follow these steps:

1. Filter the water using a piece of cloth or coffee filter to remove solid particles.
2. Bring it to a rolling boil for about one full minute.
3. Let it cool at least 30 minutes. Water must be cool or the chlorine treatment described below will be useless.
4. Add 16 drops of liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water, or eight drops per 2-liter bottle of water. Stir to mix. Sodium hypochlorite of a 5.25 to 6 percent concentration should be the only active ingredient

in the bleach. There should not be any added soap or fragrances. A major bleach manufacturer has also added sodium hydroxide as an active ingredient, which they state does not pose a health risk for water treatment.

5. Let stand 30 minutes.
6. If the water smells of chlorine, you can use it. If it does not smell of chlorine, add 16 more drops of chlorine bleach per gallon of water (or eight drops per 2-liter bottle of water), let stand 30 minutes, and smell it again. If it smells of chlorine, you can use it. If it does not smell of chlorine, discard it and find another source of water.

If local public health department information differs from this advice, the local information should prevail.

Resources

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): www.fema.gov
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Service: <http://weather.gov>

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