

Dealing with the Aftermath of a Flood



Besides the danger of drowning, floods pose the risk of electrocution, fire, explosion, building collapse, poisoning from chemical spills and many other hazards. Many flood-related injuries and fatalities occur during the clean-up process. So if your workplace is in a flood zone, here's some important safety information:

The Importance of Wearing the Right Gear

It's natural to want to get back into the workplace and clean up as soon as possible after the flood waters recede. But cleaning up after a flood is in some ways more dangerous than dealing with the actual deluge. Flood waters carry disease and hazardous chemicals. They leave buildings and structures dangerously weakened. And they cause fuel leaks, electrical hazards and chemical emissions.

The first thing your workers need to do to protect themselves is to wear appropriate PPE during cleanup, such as a hardhat, goggles, heavy waterproof gloves and boots with a steel toe and insole. Disposable gloves are needed for handling contaminated materials. It might also be necessary to use a respirator to protect against bacteria, mould, bleach vapours, toxic gas or chemicals or oxygen deficiency.

Dealing with 6 Flood Hazards

Your workers should also be acquainted with the different hazards associated with flood cleanup. Here are some do's and don'ts to deal with six common hazards:

1. Electrical Hazards

- DO remember that electric shock is a common flood danger and that the danger comes from contact with energized electrical equipment.
- DON'T enter a flooded area unless you're sure the power has been shut off at the main breaker.
- DO make sure the main breaker or fuse has been shut off on the building's service panel before starting a generator to prevent electrical energy from backfeeding into power lines.
- DON'T touch downed power lines or other electrical equipment when you're wet or standing in water.

2. Structural Hazards

- DON'T enter or walk on a flood-damaged structure until it has been certified as safe.
- DO get out quickly if you observe or hear the building or structure shift.

3. Contamination Hazards

- DO bear in mind that flood water isn't clean and that it gets mixed with sewage and other contaminants creating a noxious fluid that can cause disease.
- DO disinfect items and surfaces that have been in contact with flood waters using a bleach solution.
- DON'T eat or drink any food items that have been touched by flood waters. Throw the stuff out.

4. Hazardous Materials

- DO remember that flood water is also likely to be tainted by chemicals from agricultural, industrial and residential sources, creating a threat of poisoning or fire.
- DO exercise care around pipes, tanks and drums of hazardous materials which may have become dislodged and damaged during a flood.
- DON'T handle containers of unidentified chemicals after a flood. Call hazardous materials personnel or the fire department to dispose of them.

5. Explosion Hazards

- DO be aware that natural gas may leak from broken pipes, setting the stage for an explosion.
- DON'T use or keep sources of ignition near gas lines.
- DO call for help from the utility company.

6. Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

- DO be conscious of the danger posed by carbon monoxide after a flood.
- DO exercise particular care around gasoline or diesel-powered generators, pumps and pressure washers, which are apt to emit carbon monoxide.
- DON'T use this type of equipment indoors or in confined spaces.

To help your workers make sure that they're prepared for dealing with flooding at *home*, give them this flood preparedness and response guide from the federal government.