



FEMA

Recovery News

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DON'T PUMP OUT BASEMENTS TOO EARLY OR TOO FAST

ANDOVER, Mass. – Emergency management officials warn residents to be very careful when returning to a home with a flooded basement. Electrical and sewage problems may exist; there are also precautions to take when pumping out a basement that was flooded in the recent storms.

If the basement is flooded and the breaker box has been submerged under water, do NOT turn on the electric service. Where electrical equipment has been submerged, it will need to be replaced. Contact an electrician to do this work. The electrician may restore the power; however, the town electrical inspector must approve the work done by an electrician.

If the basement is flooded and you suspect that there may be sewage mixed in with the flood waters, it is recommended that you hire a professional cleaning contractor.

Pumping procedures:

Removing all of the water at once may cause serious structural damage to the house. According to federal and state disaster recovery specialists, the water must be drained slowly to equalize pressure on both sides of the walls. Draining the water too fast could cause the collapse of the cellar walls, floors and foundation. Bracing of interior walls may be required to offset hydrostatic (water) pressure outside of the walls.

After flooding recedes, groundwater in the saturated soil may still be pushing against the outside of the basement walls. Floodwater in the basement counters this pressure. If flooded basements are drained faster than groundwater subsides, the outside hydrostatic pressure will be greater than the inside pressure and may cause the foundation, basement walls or floor to crack or rupture.

Officials recommend the following procedures be followed when pumping basements to avoid serious damage, collapse or injury to occupants:

- Begin pumping when floodwaters are no longer covering the ground outside;
- Pump out one foot of water. Mark the water level and wait overnight;
- Check the water level the next day. If the level went back up (covering the mark), it is still too early to drain your basement;

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- Wait 24 hours, and then pump the water down one foot again. Check the level the next day;
- When the water in the basement stops returning to your mark, pump out 2-3 feet and wait overnight;
- Repeat daily until all the water is out of the basement;
- Consider installing bracing horizontally across basement (wall to wall) as the water subsides.

Hazard mitigation specialists, responsible for advising on risk-reduction measures, said they understand people are anxious to return home and begin the clean-up but urged caution, as the expense of rebuilding collapsed walls could be more than the cost of clean-up from the flood.

Residents with flood damage or loss in a declared county should register with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as soon as possible.

- Call to register at the toll-free registration line, **800-621-FEMA (3362)**, between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. seven days a week or call (800) 462-7585 (TTY) for people with speech or hearing disabilities. Registration online is at www.DisasterAssistance.com.
- Residents may then visit one of the six Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs) which are open throughout the disaster-affected counties. Risk-reduction specialists will be there in person to provide advice and publications that will help to reduce damage in the future.
- The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and the Council of Massachusetts United Ways (COMUW) continue to promote Mass 2-1-1 as the Commonwealth's primary telephone information call center during times of emergency. The easy-to-remember 2-1-1 telephone number will be utilized as a 24/7 resource for human service and Public Safety/disaster response and planning agencies.

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders and to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

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