

## **After the Flood: Clean-up Tips for Communities and Homeowners**

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“Flood dangers do not end when the waters begins to recede,” says Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) Acting Director Ken McBride. “To that end, MEMA shares this information to help ensure the continued safety of you, your family, your property and your community.”

The following tips, which have been issued by MEMA, include information developed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

- If you have been evacuated, listen to the Media and your local Public Safety officials. Do not return home until authorities indicate that it is safe to do so.
- Avoid floodwaters. The water may be contaminated by oil, gasoline, or raw sewage.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and clean water if you come in contact with floodwaters.
- Never attempt to drive into or through floodwaters. Your vehicle can be quickly swept away by as little as two feet of moving water. Many flood fatalities are vehicle related.
- Be aware of areas where floodwaters have receded. Roads may have weakened and could collapse under the weight of your car.
- Do not become a spectator. Unnecessary travel into the most impacted areas could hinder efforts of Public Safety officials.
- Avoid all downed power lines. Electrical current can travel through water. Assume all wires are live. Report downed electrical wires to your utility company or local authorities.
- Before returning to a building, inspect it for cracks or other damage. When entering, use extreme caution; make sure that the building is not in danger of collapsing.
- Take pictures of the damage, both to the house and its contents, for insurance claims.
- Look for hazards such as broken or leaking gas lines, flooded electrical circuits, submerged furnaces, or electrical appliances and damaged sewage systems. Report them to the utility company or local authorities.
- Until local authorities proclaim your water supply safe, boil water for drinking and food preparation vigorously for five minutes before using.
- Flooded buildings should be pumped out and disinfected. Pump out basements gradually, about 1/3 per day, to avoid structural damage.

- After the water is pumped out, solid waste should be disposed of in a functioning sewage disposal system or sealed in plastic bags for disposal in an approved landfill.
- All flooded floor and wall surfaces should be washed with a solution of two capfuls of household bleach for each gallon of water.
- Carpeting, mattresses, and upholstered furniture should be disposed of or cleaned and disinfected by a professional cleaner.
- Dampness in basements, walls, carpets, and wood provide an excellent environment for mold to flourish. If you see or smell mold, take immediate steps to eliminate the excess moisture.
- Throw away food that has come in contact with floodwaters.
- Do not turn your yard into a dump. Have debris hauled away before it causes additional health hazards.
- Yards that have been contaminated by flooded sewage systems should be disinfected by a liberal application of lime. Children and animals should be kept away from limed areas until the lime is no longer visible.
- If your home, apartment, or business has suffered damage, call your insurance company or agent who handles your flood insurance right away to file a claim. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) administers the National Flood Insurance Plan (NFIP) through the Federal Insurance Administration (FIA). The NFIP makes flood insurance available in communities that adopt and enforce ordinances to reduce flood damage.
- Be a good neighbor. Make sure those around you are safe and have the help that they need.
- Be prepared for a rough time. Recovering from a flood is a big job. It is taxing on the body and spirit. The after-effects of this type of disaster on you and your family may last a long time. Consult a health professional on how to recognize and care for anxiety, stress, and fatigue.