

The ABC's of Returning to Flooded Buildings



HURRICANE KATRINA RECOVERY ADVISORY

Hurricane Katrina produced widespread flooding from both storm surge and levee breaches. The combination of water intrusion and delayed re-entry due to evacuation requirements and power interruption has created a situation that demands careful planning by individuals returning to flood damaged buildings. The following tips are designed to assist impacted individuals when they are able to reach their flooded property. Additional information can be found in the Hurricane Katrina Recovery Advisory, *Initial Restoration for Flooded Buildings*.

Anticipate what you will need

- Personal protective equipment including safety shoes or boots (rubber boots may be best if you are not sure if the water has been pumped out), work gloves, eye protection, rubber gloves for cleaning or when using sanitizing chemicals, a hard hat, and respiratory protection in case there is mold or bacteria contamination (respirators with HEPA cartridges or dust masks with a rating of N-95 or higher should be used). These can be obtained from hardware stores or home improvement stores. If materials containing asbestos are suspected, it will be necessary to use a respirator with a HEPA cartridge in accordance with Federal requirements.
- Tools for entry and cleaning such as a pry bar, shovel, and a flashlight with extra batteries (Figure 1)
- Camera or video recorder for recording conditions for use in insurance claims
- Hand and face cleaning supplies such as alcohol swabs or hand sanitizer gel
- Cleaning supplies for salvagable materials including potable water, chemical cleaners/sanitizers, sponges, buckets, and wiping rags
- Packing supplies to protect fragile salvaged items during transport
- First aid kit
- Pen and paper, tape, scissors, and small plastic storage bags for writing down serial numbers and saving samples of discarded materials to support insurance claims



Figure 1. Tools for entry and cleaning

Be realistic about your limitations

- Even initial assessment and salvage can be hot, heavy work.
- If at all possible, work with another person while in the house. Unforeseen hazards can exist, so having help nearby is prudent.
- Avoid entry, even with personal protective equipment, if you have serious pre-existing health issues:
 - Asthma/allergies
 - Compromised immune system
 - Heart problems
 - Open cuts or wounds
- Get help moving large items such as furniture and appliances.
- Do not underestimate the impact of psychological shock and physical effort:
 - Identify someone in advance who you can talk to about your situation and feelings
 - See the resource section for some potential contacts

Check the situation for hazards

- Downed power lines
- Gas leaks
- Evidence of structural damage such as sagging ceilings, large wall or floor cracks, walls out of plumb, etc.
- Unstable materials
 - Furniture and even vehicles can be stacked in hazardous positions (Figure 2)
- Chemical spills
 - Paints, solvents, lawn fertilizers, pesticides
- Vermin such as snakes, rats, fire ants, bee colonies, etc.
- Other hazards
 - Rotting food
 - Dead animals



Figure 2. Furniture stacked by flood waters creates a safety hazard.

Document conditions

- Photos or videos are best
 - Shoot multiple pictures of each room from different corners
 - Make sure the photos will be clear before changing the conditions
 - Use a camera with a time/date stamp for photos if possible
- Make written notes of the dates that you were at the building
- Save samples of high-quality contents such as carpets to support insurance claims

Extract the salvageable items

- Focus on high value items that were not water impacted and items that have special significance. If an entire item cannot be saved, consider parts that could be saved. For example, if a family heirloom such as an antique chest cannot be saved, consider saving the non-porous handles or hinges for use on a replacement piece.
- Porous items that were not water logged or moldy should be the second priority.
- Non-porous items such as glassware, silverware, and plastic furniture that need to be cleaned should be separated. (Note: Contaminated items should be cleaned on site if possible. Transporting wet/contaminated items presents the risk of cross contamination of the vehicle and location where the item is moved.)
- Be aware of termites. If a termite infestation is found, consult a professional exterminator. When discarding or salvaging wood, paper, and other cellulose, protect your property and keep Formosan subterranean termites from spreading. For additional information, refer to the Louisiana Ag Center. (http://www.louisianafloods.org/en/family_home/hazards_and_threats/recovery_assistance/insect_pest_management/Keeping+Formosan+Termites+from+Spreading+after+Hurricanes.htm)

Facilitate restoration

- Do what you can to salvage the contents on the property.
- See American Red Cross, *Repairing Your Flooded Home*, http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0_570_,00.html

Get help

- The following resources may be useful in providing technical support during your recovery from a flooding event:
 - American Red Cross (<http://www.redcross.org>)
 - FEMA (<http://www.fema.gov>)
 - Association of Specialists in Cleaning & Restoration (<http://www.ascr.org>)
 - Louisiana State University AgCenter - Cooperative Extension Service (<http://www.LouisianaFloods.org>)
 - National Association of Home Builders (<http://www.nahb.org/category.aspx?sectionID=843>)
 - National Association of the Remodeling Industry (<http://www.nari.org>)
- The following resources may be useful in providing financial and/or psychological support during your recovery from a flooding event:
 - American Red Cross (<http://www.redcross.org>)
 - Salvation Army (http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn.nsf)
 - FEMA (<http://www.fema.gov>)
 - Small Business Administration (<http://www.sba.gov>)
 - State/local health departments - such as the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/docs/hurricaneoccupant.htm>)