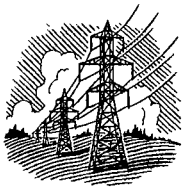
Weathering Floods, Storms and Power Outages



This information is compiled for your information and use by
The Suffolk County Department of Health Services from material supplied
by The New York State Department of Health

RE-ENTERING YOUR HOME

When is it safe to reoccupy my home?

If you were ordered to evacuate your home, you must check with the mayor's office, town supervisor or local codes enforcement official before returning to your home. Even if you evacuated voluntarily, you should call the town clerk or the building department to ask about the status of buildings in your area and if there are any requirements before re-entry.

What should I look for when coming back into a home that has experienced a flood?

Floods may damage the electric, gas, plumbing and sanitary systems in your house, which may affect the indoor air quality. If you smell natural gas or sulfur odors DO NOT ENTER THE BUILDING. If what you smell is natural gas, call 911 from a safe location and wait until they allow you to enter.

When entering your home for repairs and to retrieve personal items, make a quick personal safety evaluation before entering the building. Do not use or operate any system without checking it first.

Check for

- The structure of the building – did it suffer damage?
- Electrical system damage, including high voltage and insulation
- Plumbing, septic and sewer lines
- Air conditioner, heat pump, duct work or forced hot air furnace damage

Should I have my indoor air quality tested?

No. Indoor air quality testing is not recommended.

How can I know if my air quality is OK?

Make sure your carbon monoxide detectors are working, because carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas that you cannot see or smell. Every home should have a carbon monoxide detector, battery-powered or with a battery back-up.

If you hear the carbon monoxide detector alarm, get out of the building. If you smell natural gas or sulfur odors, stay out of the building and call 911.

You should have your gas, electric, and heating systems checked by a professional before turning them on.

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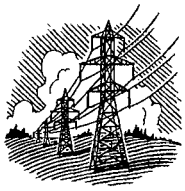

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Who can I call if I have more questions about my indoor air quality?

Call the New York State Department of Health, Center for Environmental Health, Bureau of Toxic Substance Assessment, 518-402-7810 (800-458-1158).

What precautions do I need to take to be safe when using electricity in flooded areas?

Remember, water conducts electricity. Don't run extension cords through flooded areas, use or touch electrical tools or appliances if you are standing in water, and don't enter flooded areas until you are sure that the situation does not pose an electrical shock hazard.

Water can damage electrical appliances, such as furnaces, freezers, refrigerators, washing machines, dryers, fans, dehumidifiers, etc. Electrical equipment and appliances exposed to water can be extremely hazardous if they are put in service without proper reconditioning or replacement. Ocean water and salt spray can be particularly damaging. Electrical panels that have been submerged or exposed to saltwater will need to be inspected by a qualified electrician.

If you have questions or concerns regarding electrical service contact your local utility or qualified electrician.

When can I restart furnaces and boilers?

Oil-fired furnaces or boilers should not be started until they have been checked by a service technician. The danger is that a furnace or boiler could give off dangerous gases, including carbon monoxide, which can be deadly and must be vented. If a furnace or boiler is damaged, gases may be released in your home. Be sure all vents around tanks and all flue vents are not blocked so that gases can exhaust freely.

Submersion or prolonged exposure to salt water can increase the potential for corrosion. In addition to damage by the storm and flooding, above and below ground storage tanks containing bulk liquids (fuel oil/kerosene) along the coast are susceptible to corrosion by saltwater and should be inspected accordingly. Leakage could contaminate ecosystems and drinking water and be costly to clean up.

Should I be concerned about health effects from flood water?

Flood waters may contain substances that are harmful to health. It may contain germs (e.g., bacteria, viruses) and chemicals that could make you sick. Take these precautions:

- If you have open cuts or sores, try not to contact flood water.
- If you are exposed to flood water, keep your skin, especially any cuts or sores, as clean as possible by washing with soap and disinfected or boiled water. Apply antibiotic ointment and cover with a sterile bandage to reduce the risk of infection.
- If you have deep cuts and/or puncture wounds and have not had a tetanus vaccination within the past 10 years or are unsure if you have, get a tetanus booster.