



News for Immediate Release

Sept. 10, 2011

DEP Offers Tips to Residents Dealing with Flood-ravaged Property

Cleanup, Leaking Home Fuel Tanks, Water Well Disinfection, Important Considerations

Harrisburg — The Department of Environmental Protection is advising residents whose homes or businesses have been affected by flood waters to take a number of precautions to assure a safe cleanup.

“Thousands of people and homes have been impacted by the tragic flooding in the commonwealth over the past several days. It is gut-wrenching to see the many pictures of the devastation, destruction and human suffering,” DEP Secretary Mike Krancer said. “People need to be very careful when returning to their homes and businesses and must be aware of a number of precautions they need to take to ensure their safety and good health.”

Homeowners who suffered flood damage should note these cleanup guidelines:

- Be careful when entering a flood-damaged building. Loose, wet ceiling plaster is heavy and dangerous, so knock down hanging plaster before moving around. Watch for holes in the floor and loose boards with exposed nails.
- Once inside, turn off the gas and electricity. Wear rubber-soled shoes or boots and rubber gloves and turn off the main switch using a piece of rubber, plastic or dry wood while standing on a dry board to avoid electrocution.
- Do not pump the basement until the water has gone down, as pumping a water-filled basement could result in the walls collapsing.
- Never use a gas-powered pump or generator in an enclosed area; carbon monoxide fumes could overcome you.
- Test plumbing and basement drains by pouring a bucket of water in them. If the water does not run out, remove the clean-out plug from the trap and rake out the mud with a wire.
- Do not rush to move back into your home. Before a house is habitable, it must be dried and thoroughly cleaned, since flood waters pick up sewage and chemicals as they travel.
- Open doors and windows to ventilate and dry the inside, and wait until all floors, ceilings, walls and furnishings are dry and free of mold and mildew before trying to repair or salvage them.

- Everything that flood water has touched should be disinfected. Scrub down walls and any other smooth, hard surfaces with a solution made of clean water and two-percent chlorine bleach. Two to three capfuls of chlorine bleach to a bucket of water are recommended. Wear gloves when disinfecting surfaces.
- Do not attempt to repair floors until they are fully dry. Dry wood floors as soon as possible by opening all doors and windows, which should prevent them from shrinking and deforming. Once dry, buckled floors may be drawn back into place with nails, and planing and sanding may remove humps.
- Remove drawers and clean all mud and dirt from wooden furniture. Be sure to dry furniture slowly and indoors to prevent the sun from warping it.
- If possible, simply air-dry family treasures such as books, photographs or paintings. If wet books, documents, photographs or textiles cannot be air-dried within 48 hours, freeze them if you have a freezer that is large enough. If not, keep them as cool as possible until air-drying is possible.
- Washers, dryers and furnaces can usually be cleaned and tested by qualified electricians. Replacing expensive appliances after a flood is usually not necessary.
- Mattresses, carpets and rugs should be discarded. In most cases, mattresses and rugs become so saturated with contaminated material that cleaning attempts are futile.

To deal with leaking home fuel tanks in flooded basements, remove the fuel oil from the surface of the water and place it in a container for disposal. The water that is under the product can be directed to the nearest waterway. After pumping your basement, try to remove and place in a container any remaining product and stop the leak in the tank.

If your private groundwater well or spring has been flooded, follow specific disinfection instructions to temporarily address the problem. These can be found in the Flood-related Information tab at www.dep.state.pa.us. You will need a bucket, garden hose, funnel and chlorinating compound, which is sold in liquid and granular form at grocery and home-improvement stores.

Even after the disinfection process is completed, water should be tested for bacteria. DEP's regional offices will be equipped by Monday with test kits to distribute at no cost to residents. For contact information for the regional office in your area, consult the Regional Resources tab of DEP's website. Until tested and found potable, continue to use bottled water or bring your water to a rolling boil and let it boil for at least one minute. Bottled or boiled water should be used for drinking, cooking, food preparation, dishwashing, making ice and coffee, mixing baby formula and brushing teeth.

For assistance beyond what is available on DEP's website, call 1-866-255-5158 any time or consult the Penn State University Cooperative Extension's Master Well Owner Network at <http://extension.psu.edu/water/mwon>.

For more information, visit the Flood-related Information page at www.dep.state.pa.us.

Media contact: Katy Gresh, 412-298-7538 (cell)