



FEMA

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News Release

Safety First! Iowans Urged to Use Caution When Returning to Flood-Damaged Homes and Businesses

DES MOINES, Iowa – Returning to a disaster-damaged house or business can present dangers and challenges. That’s why state and federal disaster officials are urging Iowans to use extra caution when cleaning up flood-damaged properties.

First and foremost, do not return to disaster-impacted areas until local officials have given the all- clear to do so.

Second, check with local officials if you are unsure about whether your house or business is safe to enter or occupy. If official signage is posted on the structure or a notification from officials warning that the structure has been compromised, do not disregard that message. Address the concern before re-entering or occupying.

Third, recognize that potential health/safety hazards after a disaster can include:

- Carbon monoxide poisoning from generators used to power homes or clean-up equipment.
- Electrocution from stepping into water charged by live electric wires.
- Infections resulting from cuts or scrapes that come into contact with surfaces contaminated by floodwater.
- Chemical hazards from spills or storage tank leaks.
- Respiratory and heat-related illnesses.

Document the condition of your structure with photos or video before beginning to clean up. This should include documenting damaged contents as well. If possible, make a list before discarding any items.

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If you are ready to start cleaning up, here are some ideas about how to reduce your risks to the dangers:

BEWARE OF HAZARDS

- **First, check for damage.** Check for structural damage before re-entering your home or business. Contact professionals (utility reps, plumbers, electricians, etc.) immediately if you suspect damage to water, gas, electric or sewer lines.
- **Throw away food** that has come in contact with floodwater.
- **Check with local authorities** for any boil water orders/advisories water.

CLEAN UP

- **Remove wet contents immediately** to prevent mold. Wet carpeting, furniture, bedding and other items holding moisture can develop mold within 24 to 48 hours.
- **Don't be quick to throw out heirlooms or valuables.** Many can be salvaged and restored. For more information, go online to: <https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/113297>
- **Thoroughly dry out the building's interior.** Portable dehumidifiers are useful, and rental costs may be covered under a homeowner's or flood insurance policy. An air conditioner also can be used to start the drying-out process.
- **Have your appliances checked for damage before re-using.** This would include water heaters, furnaces, air conditioners, refrigerators, freezers, etc.
- **Plan before you repair.** The rebuilding decisions you make now to lower your risk and insurance costs can result in benefits over the long term.
- **Contact your local building inspections, planning office or county clerk's office** to get more information on local building requirements before repairing your structure.

FILE YOUR FLOOD INSURANCE CLAIM

- **Call the insurance agent** who handles your flood insurance to file a claim. Have the following information with you when you place your call: your policy number and a telephone number/e-mail address where you can be reached.
- **List damaged or lost items** and include their age and value where possible. If available, supply receipts for those lost items to your insurance adjuster. Community officials may require disposal of damaged items for health and safety reasons. If so, provide photos or samples of other damaged or lost items for your insurance adjuster.

To learn more about recommended steps that should be taken immediately after a flood, go online to: <http://www.ready.gov/floods>

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Flood survivors who need disaster information, shelter information or referrals are urged to call 2-1-1. **The TTY phone number is 1-866-385-6525.** Multilingual services are available.

If you are in one of seven Iowa counties currently designated for federal disaster assistance – Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Monona, Pottawattamie, Shelby or Woodbury – you can register with FEMA. Here’s how:

- Go online to www.disasterassistance.gov
- Download the FEMA app on your smartphone www.fema.gov/mobile-app
- Call toll-free 800-621-3362 (voice/711/video relay service). Lines are open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week until further notice. For TTY, dial 800-462-7585.
- Visit a Disaster Recovery Center (DRC). To find the nearest DRC, go online to www.fema.gov/DRC

If your county has not been designated for federal disaster assistance, consider applying for the Iowa Individual Assistance program. This state-funded program can provide up to \$5,000 for individuals who have an income up to 200% of poverty level and who live in one of the counties the governor designated for this program. To find out if your county has been designated and how to apply, go online to www.floods2019.iowa.gov and click on ‘Recovery Assistance.’

Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has faced discrimination, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-3362, voice/VP/711. Multilingual operators are available. TTY users may call 800-462-7585.

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FEMA's mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters.

HSEMD Mission: To lead, coordinate and support homeland security and emergency management functions in order to establish sustainable communities and ensure economic opportunities for Iowa and its citizens.