



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

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STATE AGENCIES URGE CAUTION DURING STORM AND FLOOD CLEANUP

MADISON—The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) and Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) are urging residents and crews to use caution while assessing damage or removing debris after severe storms.

Downed power lines, broken glass, and exposed nails are some of the dangers people can encounter while assessing damage or cleaning up after a storm. Residents should also avoid entering any structure that has been damaged until it has been checked by their gas and electric utility and a licensed contractor or building inspector to make sure it is safe for re-entry.

Other ways to avoid injury during cleanup include:

- Wear sturdy shoes or boots, long sleeves and gloves when handling or walking on or near debris.
- In general, if you suspect any damage to your home, even if the damage isn't readily apparent, shut off electrical power, natural gas and propane tanks to avoid fire, electrocution, or explosions.
- If the power is out, use battery-powered lanterns to light homes rather than candles. Candles could trigger an explosion if there is a gas leak.
- Never use gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices like camp stoves or generators inside the home, or even outside near an open window, door, or vent. Carbon monoxide from these sources can build up and cause illness or death.

Even with so much to think about, it's also a good time for people to make sure tetanus shots are up-to-date. Tetanus is caused by bacteria and often enters the body through puncture wounds, like those caused by nails.

Besides tornadoes and severe thunderstorms, another risk is heavy rains leading to flooding. Health and safety risks abound during the flood and afterward.

To avoid injury or death during a flood:

- Move to higher ground, especially if the threat is imminent. Don't wait for instructions to move.
- If you must evacuate, first secure your home and turn off utilities at main switches or valves.

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- Disconnect electrical appliances, but do NOT touch electrical equipment if you are wet or standing in water.
- Do not walk through moving water.
- Do not drive in flooded areas.

To avoid injury after a flood:

- Return home only when authorities say it is safe.
- Avoid driving or walking through areas that were flooded. Floodwaters often erode roads and walkways.
- Use extreme caution when entering buildings as there may be hidden damage, particularly to foundations.

Once flood cleanup begins, remember that water damage can often lead to unhealthy mold growth within days after floodwaters have receded. It is wise to consult a professional with flood cleanup experience to assess how serious a mold problem is, and the best way to remove it.

Private well owners whose well has been submerged by floodwaters should wait until floodwaters recede before testing the well for contamination. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides guidance on how to cope with a flooded well: <http://dnr.wi.gov/emergency/FloodCoping.html>

Finally, keep food safety in mind. Refrigerated and frozen foods should be inspected, especially if there was a power outage. Check the smell and appearance of all meats, seafood, milk, produce and leftovers and “when in doubt, throw it out.” Also, any food that was touched by floodwaters – even if it was stored in a waterproof container – should be thrown out.

For more information about weather-related health and safety, visit:

<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/injuryprevention/WeatherRelated/index.htm>

For more information about severe weather and other emergency preparation, visit:

<http://readywisconsin.wi.gov/>

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