

Hurricane Fact Sheet

After the Storm: Injury Prevention

A severe storm can leave many problems in its wake. The media is usually filled with stories of people who are injured after a storm passes by. Don't become a statistic:

- **Follow orders** of any emergency service personnel.
- **Drive cautiously.** Do not drive through flooded roads. Water may be deeper than it appears. Twenty-four of the 52 deaths attributed to Hurricane Floyd in 1999 occurred when motorists attempted to navigate flooded roads. An additional nine Floyd-related deaths occurred in other motor vehicle accidents.
- **Wear Life Jackets.** In the event of rising flood water, children and adults who are not strong swimmers should wear U.S. Coast Guard approved life jackets--personal flotation devices (PFDs)--whenever they are in or around the water. Everyone, including strong swimmers, should wear a Coast Guard approved PFD when in a boat used for rescue or escape. Select the PFD for the person's weight and size (printed on the label). For workers, NIOSH recommends that they avoid working alone and wear a Coast Guard approved life jacket when working in or near flood waters.
- **Watch out for loose or dangling power lines;** stay away from them and report them immediately to the proper authorities.
- **Do not leave children unattended.** Do not allow them to play in or explore damaged or flooded areas. Keep chemicals used for cleaning and disinfecting, fuel for generators, and pest-control substances out of reach of children.
- **Wear sturdy shoes or boots and protective clothing** such as heavy pants, long sleeves and gloves when cleaning up debris. Use an insect repellent containing DEET to reduce chances of mosquito bites and to reduce risk of mosquito-borne illnesses such as West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis. Stinging caterpillars and insects such as bees and wasps can become very aggressive after a storm. Survey the area before beginning cleanup and use a commercially available pesticide if needed. Poisonous snakes may also seek shelter in flooded homes; take precautions to avoid snakebites. Seek medical help if attacked by large numbers of insects, as reactions can be severe.
- **Animal bites have increased after past storms.** Animals may become frightened and act oddly after a storm. Be cautious when dealing with domestic animals like dogs and cats, especially those that you don't know, and avoid any contact with wild animals.
- **Don't get burned.** During past storms, reports of burn injuries have increase. If you are using camp stoves or fires to cook with, pay attention and don't get burned.
- **Protect your eyes.** Eye injuries have increased during past storms. Make sure to wear eye protection if you are handling chainsaws and watch where you are going – a storm may have placed materials at eye level that could be harmful.
- **Fight the bite.** Mosquitoes, caterpillars, bees and other stinging pests may have lost their homes during a storm. They are likely to be buzzing about and could hurt you. Apply insect repellent according to the label directions.



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- **Watch out for snakes.** They, too, have lost their habitat and make be in places where they don't normally occur.
- **Exercise particular caution in using power tools or tackling large debris,** which can shift suddenly. Chain saws are particularly dangerous; get proper safety training before using one. Inexperienced individuals are routinely injured when using chain saws in post-storm cleanup. Falls are common; use safety equipment and get trained help with large or difficult jobs. Don't take chances.
- If the electrical power to your home is off and you cook on a charcoal or gas grill, **carbon monoxide is a threat.** A odorless, colorless gas produced by combustion, carbon monoxide can be deadly. Use a grill only in an open, well-ventilated area, never inside the house, and keep it away from flammable materials.
- The **exhaust fumes from gasoline-powered generators** are another source of carbon monoxide poisoning. Never use a generator in an enclosed area such as a basement or garage. Make sure the area is well-ventilated, dry and preferably covered.
- **Generators also pose electrical hazards.** Do not connect the generator to your home's electrical system. Instead, connect appliances directly to the generator with properly sized polarized extension cords. Do not overload the generator or the cords, and place the cords where no one will trip over them. Be sure the generator is properly grounded (follow the manufacturer's directions). Before refueling, let the engine cool for at least two minutes to prevent fires. Store extra fuel in a safe, dry area.
- **If you are returning to a storm-damaged house,** be particularly careful. Before entering the building, check for structural damage to be sure there is no danger of collapse. Turn off any outside gas lines at the meter or tank and let the house air for a few minutes. Even if the electricity is off in the neighborhood, make sure the electrical power is turned off at the main breaker or fuse box. Electricity and water are a dangerous combination--if you have to step in water to get to the breaker box, call a professional electrician first for advice. Don't turn on any lights, appliances, or gas systems until they've been tested. If you must enter the house at night, use a battery-operated flashlight, never an open flame as a light source, and do not smoke.
- **If the house has been flooded,** electrical wires and appliances will have to be cleaned and thoroughly dried, inside and outside, before they can be safely used again. Contact your electrical power company, the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, or a professional electrician for advice.

A study of 2,090 hurricane-related emergency department visits during and after Hurricane Hugo in 1989, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta and the North Carolina Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources, found that 88 percent of the patients were treated for injuries. Insect stings and wounds accounted for nearly half of the total cases. Nearly one-third of the wounds were caused by chain saws. Motor vehicle accidents and falls were also major causes of hurricane-related injuries. Many such injuries can be prevented by being aware of hazards and by avoiding potentially dangerous situations.

