



DISASTER NEWS



MISSISSIPPI EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY -- FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**FEMA-DR-1398-MS-NR04
December 13, 2001**

**Contacts: Amy Bissell, MEMA, 601-960-9039
(After hours pager, 601-930-2652)**

**Jay Eaker, FEMA, 601-956-1844
(After hours pager, 800-759-8888, PIN# 1071383)**

RESIDENTS WARNED TO BE CAREFUL WHEN RETURNING TO FLOOD- DAMAGED HOMES

JACKSON, Miss. December 13, 2001 - Federal and state disaster officials urge people to take extra precautions when returning to flood-damaged homes, apartments or businesses.

“The dangers are not over just because the water may have receded,” State Coordinating Officer Leon Shaifer said. “Flood hazards such as exposed wires, contaminated floodwater, black mold, or structural deterioration are not always obvious but can be life-threatening. We urge people to be very careful.”

The federal coordinating officer for the disaster recovery, Gracia Szczech, also warned flood victims to be careful of potential chemical hazards such as solvents, car batteries, propane tanks and other industrial chemicals. “If you are unsure of a situation, ask for help or seek advice from an expert,” Szczech said. “Play it safe.”

Disaster officials are urging people to keep these safety tips in mind:

BEFORE ENTERING A BUILDING:

Check the outside of the building: Call the utility company immediately if you find downed power lines or detect gas leaks. (Gas leaks will emit an odor of rotten eggs.)

Look for external damage: Examine the foundation for cracks or other damage. Inspect porch roofs and overhangs to be sure they are adequately supported. If any portion of the foundation has been undermined, it may not be safe to enter the building. For obvious damage, ask a building inspector to check the house before you go inside.

Enter the building carefully: If the door sticks at the top as it opens, it could mean the ceiling is ready to cave in. If you decide to force the door open, stand outside the doorway to avoid being hit by falling debris.

- MORE -

AFTER ENTERING A BUILDING:

Look before you step: Floors and stairs may be covered with debris and be very slippery. Watch out for broken bottles, nails and other hazards.

Be alert for gas leaks: Do not strike a match or use an open flame when entering a building unless you know the gas has been turned off and the area has been ventilated. Use a flashlight to inspect for damage.

Turn off the electricity: Even if the power company has turned off electricity to the area, be sure to disconnect your house's power supply. Do not use appliances or motors that have gotten wet unless they have been taken apart, cleaned and dried.

Replace exposed wires: Electrical wires that have been exposed to salt water should be considered recyclable junk and be replaced.

Watch for animals, especially snakes: Small animals that have been flooded out of their homes may seek shelter in yours. Scare them away by poking a stick into likely hiding places.

Carbon monoxide exhaust kills: Do not use generators or other gasoline-powered machines indoors. All cooking on camp stoves and charcoal grills should be done outside. Gas and charcoal fumes can be deadly.

Drain the basement carefully and slowly: Groundwater creates hydrostatic pressure on basement walls and floors. Drain the basement no more than one foot per day to minimize further structural damage.

Hose the house: Many health hazards are found in mud and silt which floodwaters leave behind. Shovel as much mud as possible out of the house, then hose it down, inside and out.

Be aware of health hazards: Floodwaters pick up sewage and chemicals from roads, farms, factories and storage buildings. Many flooded items, such as wallboard and mattresses, will hold mud and contamination forever. Spoiled food, water-logged cosmetics and medicine are also health hazards. When in doubt, throw them out.

Beware of mold problems: All molds – including black mold – have the potential to cause adverse health effects and significant, ongoing structural damage to buildings. Molds also can produce allergens that can trigger allergic reactions or even asthma attacks in people allergic to mold. Do not touch mold or moldy items with bare hands, avoid getting mold in your eyes and avoid breathing mold or mold spores. Black mold in buildings should be treated aggressively to prevent rapid spread and deterioration. For more information and cleanup guidelines, contact the Mississippi State Department of Health at their website, www.msdh.state.ms.us.

###

Note to Editor: Information on (disaster) is available on FEMA's homepage on the Internet at <http://www.fema.gov>. Information also is available through FEMA's 24-hour fax-on-demand service by calling (202) 646-FEMA.