

News & Notes

AFTER THE FLOOD

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) urges everyone engaged in cleanup after floods—employers, workers and the public—to avoid potential hazards and take steps to protect themselves.

“People must be aware of possible hazards—from chemically contaminated water to unstable structures—created in the aftermath of the disaster,” said John Hermanson, OSHA’s regional administrator in Dallas. “Everyone involved in the cleanup needs personal protective equipment and proper training to prevent injury and illness. The safety and health of the public is a priority.”

Before entering buildings or structures after a flood, an assessment of the potential hazards and exposure must be done. Using that information, an employer must ensure that workers, at a minimum, are provided with education on the hazards they face and how to protect themselves.



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Flood cleanup safety

What you need to know

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the nature of flood cleanups varies by location. While a flooded residential home may not present the obvious hazards that a commercial property with stored hazardous chemicals would, each situation has its own challenges.

Homeowners, for example, should be aware that damaged structures may be at risk of collapse, and the onset of mold may have already begun. Workplaces may have these same dangers, in addition to many other serious safety threats, including chemical exposure.

Employers should evaluate chemical workplace hazards and create a chemical inventory, which is part of a workplace hazard communication program.

In either situation, homeowners and employers should request the assistance of a safety and health professional.

People involved in flood cleanup should take the following precautions:

- **Use appropriate personal protective equipment.** Wear a hard hat, safety glasses, reflective vest, gloves, and steel-toed work boots.
- **Stay dry** in wet environments by wearing waterproof gloves and boots.
- **Breathe safely and use respiratory protection,** especially where dust and mold exist.
- **Avoid dangerous falls and use fall protection** when working more than 6 feet off the ground.
- **Protect your hearing.** In loud and noisy environments, hearing protection is important.
- **Work cleanly.** Stop the spread of contaminants and disease with proper hygiene and sanitation.
- **Wash your hands regularly.** Where suitable facilities are absent, use hand sanitizer.

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HEAT APP & WEBSITE

In a joint media teleconference National Weather Service (NWS) Deputy Director Laura Furgione and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) administrator David Michaels, PhD, announced that their organizations are teaming up to improve awareness about dangerous heat conditions.

For example, OSHA has enhanced its Heat Safety Tool smartphone app, which allows workers and supervisors to calculate the heat index at their worksite. The app lets the user know instantly if workers are in the high-risk zone due to heat and humidity and indicates the necessary precautions to take. The app is free and available for iPhone and Android at https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/heatillness/heat_index/heat_app.html.

In addition, Furgione said the weather service now provides better warnings about the risks and called on meteorologists to include information about worker safety during their broadcasts. NWS has created a new heat safety page at <http://www.weather.gov/rah/heat>.



Hot weather refresher

Remember the dangers of working in the heat

Avoid heat stress and illnesses, such as **heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke**, when you work in the heat by taking these precautions:

- Gradually build up hours spent working in heat.
- Wear light, loose clothing.
- Wear a hat outdoors.
- Drink water steadily before and during working in heat.
- Avoid hot foods and drinks that contain alcohol or caffeine.
- Don't overexert yourself; work at a steady pace.
- Take regular breaks in cool places.

If you do experience **heat cramps**, drink water. If you or a coworker experience the symptoms of **heat exhaustion**—which include weakness; dizziness; sweating; moist, pale, or flushed skin—move to a cool place; loosen clothes and apply cool compresses; drink water slowly; and elevate feet 8 to 12 inches.

Heatstroke is the most serious illness and is marked by a lack of sweating; high body temperature; dry and hot skin; chills; strong rapid pulse; and confusion. If someone shows these symptoms:

- Treat as a medical emergency and call for a doctor immediately.
 - Move to a cool area immediately.
 - Use cool water to soak the person's clothes and body.
 - Fan the person's body.
 - Don't administer fluids if the victim is unconscious.
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The power of dust

Know the dangers of combustible dust

Dust that accumulates in the workplace may create a serious fire and explosion hazard. In addition to the “**fire triangle**” of an ignition source, oxygen, and a fuel source, combustible dust explosions require dispersion of dust in a confined area. This is called the “**dust explosion pentagon.**”

Hazardous dust may accumulate in areas where it is not easily seen or cleaned, including:

- On elevated surfaces;
- Inside ventilation ductwork;
- In crevices;
- In dust collectors and process equipment; *and*
- Above suspended ceilings and in plenum spaces.

Here's how you can protect yourself from combustible dust hazards:

- Don't use cleaning methods that could raise dust clouds, like dry sweeping and compressed air.
- Do use a vacuum designed for dust collection to clean up dust.
- Don't allow open flames and sparks in the work area without a hot work permit.
- Don't let equipment overheat by failing to maintain it.
- Do report problems.
- Do use nonsparking tools and explosion-proof equipment to prevent static electricity and sparks.