

COMING HOME AFTER A DISASTER

FACILITATOR GUIDE



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ACTIVITY: COMING HOME AFTER A DISASTER

Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to educate individuals and families about what to consider after their home has been damaged after a disaster – who normally handles what repairs, and what actions to take to begin repairs.

Objectives:

- Identify actions that are often required upon returning to a home damaged after a disaster.
- Recognize what kind of repairs homeowners may handle themselves.
- Develop a checklist for actions that homeowners can take.

Preparation and Needed Materials: Prior to conducting this activity, you may want to:

- Contact your local chapter of the American Red Cross and obtain copies of *Repairing Your Flooded Home* or access a copy from the following Web site: <http://www.fema.gov/library/>.
- Search the FEMA Web site for photos of flooded or damaged houses to use for the opening activity: <http://www.photolibrary.fema.gov/photolibrary/index.jsp>
- Contact local utility companies to ask if they will send a representative to your presentation to answer questions about checking utilities following a disaster.

Presentation Tips:

- Welcome participants to the session.
- Explain that by the end of the session, they will have developed a recovery action plan to use if a disaster damages their home.
- Post or pass around photos of flooded or damaged houses and ask participants: Imagine that this is your home. Once the waters go down, what would you do first? What do you have to consider?
- Acknowledge the answers and then present the following key points:
 - It can be both physically and emotionally difficult to return your home after a disaster.
 - Returning home after a disaster can also be dangerous. Here are a few things to consider:
 - Has the neighborhood been cleared by authorities for reentry?
 - Are the utilities on? Do you have to worry about electrical or gas hazards?

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Presentation Tips: (Continued)

- Does your home have structural damage?
- What about wildlife, such as poisonous snakes?
- Is the water safe to drink?
- Distribute copies of *Repairing Your Flooded Home* or refer participants to this Web site for more information: <http://www.fema.gov/library/>
- Distribute the Who Does What? handout. Encourage participants to get referrals now for the names and numbers of trusted contractors instead of waiting until after an emergency.
- Distribute the Recovery Action Plan handout. Briefly review the main items. Encourage participants to check off the items that apply to their location. Ask participants for input about additional items they would include.
- Optional Activity: If feasible, have representatives from local utilities explain precautions to take when entering a flooded or damaged home and when homeowners should request outside assistance. Conclude the session by emphasizing how important it is to decide what they can handle versus when to call in a professional. Ask participants if they have any questions about what to expect when returning to and repairing a flooded home.
- Thank the participants for attending the session. Explain that more information about disaster preparedness is available in other sessions.

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WHO DOES WHAT? HANDOUT



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ACTIVITY: WHO HANDLES WHAT KINDS OF REPAIRS?

Tasks the Homeowner Can Usually Do:

(Tip: Follow the steps outlined in *Repairing Your Flooded Home*.)

**PLACE THIS PAGE IN YOUR
DISASTER KIT!**

- Document the damage with photographs.
- Sort contents to be repaired or discarded.
- Dry the ceiling, walls, and floors.
- Dry and clean electrical circuits and boxes (if code allows).
- Remove minor debris such as branches and trash.
- Check the gas or oil system.
- Fix leaky pipes.
- Check sewage disposal system.
- Clean building and contents.
- Check sources of financial assistance.
- Raise appliances off the ground and complete other minor floodproofing projects.

Jobs That Usually Require Professional Services:

Type of Service/Repair	Company Name and Contact Information
Make structural repairs	
Restore electrical and/or gas service	
Repair, install, tape, and finish wallboard	
Check whether water is safe to drink	Try contacting local health department. Put phone number here:
Remove major debris such as trees	
Clean and repair electrical and gas appliances	
Clean furniture and carpeting	

COMING HOME AFTER A DISASTER

RECOVERY ACTION
PLAN: HANDOUT



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ACTIVITY: RETURNING HOME

Check the items that you think would apply to your location. Use a colored highlighter or special mark to indicate any items where you would need assistance from a professional source.

**PLACE THIS PAGE IN YOUR
DISASTER KIT!**

Assess the Situation:

- Walk carefully around the outside and check for loose power lines, gas leaks, and structural damage. If you have any doubts about safety, have your residence inspected by a qualified building inspector or structural engineer before entering.
- Watch out for animals, especially poisonous snakes. Use a stick to poke through debris.

Other: _____

Do not enter if . . .

- You smell gas.
- Floodwaters remain around the building.
- Your home was damaged by fire and the authorities have not declared it safe.

Document Damage, Inside and Out:

- Take pictures of flood damage and your cleanup efforts. Photographs are extremely helpful in documenting damage for insurance purposes. Keep good records, including how much of your personal time was spent on debris removal and cleanup.
- Record the amount of time it took you to clean up.
- If you hire cleanup or repair contractors, be sure they are qualified to do the job. Be wary of people who drive through neighborhoods offering help in cleaning up or repairing your home. Check references.

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RECOVERY ACTION
PLAN: HANDOUT



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Check Utilities:

- When re-entering the building, use flashlights instead of lanterns or candles, in case there's a gas leak. Use a battery-powered flashlight to inspect a damaged home. The flashlight should be turned on outside before entering. The battery could produce a spark that could ignite leaking gas, if present.
- Do not use matches or any type of flame until you are sure there are no gas leaks, and the area has been aired out. Check to see if any pilot lights are out.
- Call the gas company to turn the gas back on. Don't try to do it yourself. Check with your propane supplier if you are unsure how to service your propane tank yourself.
- Be sure the electricity is turned off. In case of severe flooding, do not use the electricity until a licensed electrician has checked your home.
- Have a professional check your heating system and electrical system before using them.

In case of flooding . . .

- Pump out wells and have the water tested by authorities before drinking. Do not flush toilets until you know that sewage lines are intact.
- After outside floodwaters have receded, drain only about 1/3 of the water in your basement initially. Outside pressure pushing against your basement walls can cause the basement walls to collapse. Start by pumping the water level down 2-3 feet, then mark the level and wait overnight. If the water level goes up, wait 24 hours, and then repeat the process.
- Septic systems will not work until the groundwater level is below the distribution lines.

Check Consumables and Appliances:

- Destroy all fresh or frozen food, medicine, toiletries, and cosmetics that have been in contact with floodwater or stored without proper refrigeration.
- If you suspect your water supply is contaminated, have it tested.
- If any appliances were touched by floodwater, have them checked by a qualified serviceperson before operating them.

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RECOVERY ACTION
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Protect Yourself

Because standard homeowners insurance does not cover flooding, it is important to have protection from the floods associated with hurricanes, tropical storms, heavy rains, and other conditions.

In 1968, Congress created the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) to help provide a means for property owners to financially protect themselves. The NFIP offers flood insurance to homeowners, renters, and business owners if their community participates in the NFIP. Participating communities agree to adopt and enforce ordinances that meet or exceed FEMA requirements to reduce the risk of flooding.

Find out more about the NFIP and how it can help you protect yourself at <http://www.floodsmart.gov>

