



Coming Home after a Disaster

Floods, earthquakes, tornadoes and other natural disasters can damage your home. Going back to your home after a disaster has damaged it can be hard – both physically and emotionally. If you are careful when you first go back home you can avoid hurting yourself or causing more damage to your home.

What should I take with me when I go back home for the first time?

Use the checklist below to put together some things you may need when you first go back home:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Battery-powered flashlight | <input type="checkbox"/> Boots or shoes with hard soles | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety clothing, like a hard hat and gloves |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First aid kit | <input type="checkbox"/> Camera to document damage | <input type="checkbox"/> Battery-powered radio for news and emergency updates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drinking water | <input type="checkbox"/> Trash bags | <input type="checkbox"/> Tools like a crowbar, hammer, pliers, wrench, screw drivers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning supplies | <input type="checkbox"/> Dust mask | <input type="checkbox"/> Wooden stick for turning things over |

General Safety Tips

- Use a battery-powered flashlight to inspect your home. Turn it on before you go inside, since the battery could make a spark that might set fire to any leaking gas
- Watch for animals that might have gone into your home
- Don't bring young children with you to the house because they may get hurt
- Only use the phone to report serious or life-threatening emergencies

Check your home before you go in

Walk carefully around the outside of the building and check for downed power lines, gas leaks, and damage. If you are not sure your home is safe, have a qualified building inspector check to make sure before you go inside.

Do not go in if:

- You smell gas
- There are downed power lines
- There are still floodwaters around the building
- The building has shifted off the foundation or looks like it might fall down
- Your home was damaged by fire and the authorities have not told you it is safe yet

What hazards do I need to check for?

- **Natural gas.** Turn off the main gas valve from the outside before going in for the first time. After you shut off the gas, you will need a professional to turn it back on. It is a good idea to air out your home by opening all the windows and doors. Leaking gas or oil can catch fire, so do not smoke or use oil or gas lanterns, candles, or torches inside a damaged home. If you smell gas or hear a hissing or blowing sound when you go in your home, leave right away. Call the gas company from a neighbor's house to tell them about the leak.
- **Electrical System.** Remember: electricity and water do not mix. Turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker, usually found in the basement. You must turn off the power to your home even if the power company has turned off electricity to the area. If you have to stand in water to reach the box, leave and call an electrician. Do not turn on any lights or appliances until an electrician has checked your home.
- **Roof, foundation, and chimney cracks.** If it looks like the building may fall down, leave right away. If there was deep flooding, your ceiling may be full of water. Check for sagging, since wet plaster or drywall will be heavy and sag. It is very dangerous if they fall on you, so if the ceiling is wet, stay out of the room.
- **Appliances.** If appliances are wet, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. Then unplug appliances and let them dry out. Have appliances checked by a professional before using them again.
- **Water and sewage systems.** If pipes are damaged, turn off the main water valve. A hurricane, flood or tonado can lead to unsafe water, so check with your local health department before drinking it or using it for cooking or bathing. Pump out wells and have the water tested before drinking it since debris or floodwater may have gotten in the well. Do not flush toilets until you know you're the sewage system is working.
- **Your basement.** If your basement has flooded, pump it out slowly (about one third of the water per day). If you pump too fast, the walls may collapse and the floor may buckle if the surrounding ground is still waterlogged.



Going back home after a disaster can be overwhelming, but tips above can help you to do so safely and avoid hurting yourself or further damaging your home.



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