Post Disaster Safety

After a disaster occurs, you may be in your home, in a public shelter in your community, or far away from your home. No matter where you are, it is probable that many other people are experiencing what you are going through. You will be glad that you and the other members of your household made a plan and practiced it.

**No matter where you are after a disaster, you should:**

- Remain calm and patient. Staying calm and patient will help you move safely and avoid delays or accidents caused by irrational behavior. Many people will be trying to accomplish the same things you are for the safety of their families. Patience will help everyone get through a difficult situation more easily.
- Put your Family Disaster Plan into action.
- Listen to a local radio or television station for news and instructions. Local authorities know the most appropriate advice for your community’s particular situation.
- Check for injuries. Give first aid and get help for seriously injured people. Taking care of yourself first will allow you to help others safely until emergency responders arrive.
- Help people who require special assistance—infants, elderly people, those without transportation, large families who may need additional help in an emergency situation, people with disabilities, and the people who care for them.
- Use your Disaster Supplies Kit.

**If you are at home, or when you return home, you should:**

- Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and sturdy shoes. Disaster areas and debris contain many hazards. The most common injury following disasters is cut feet.
- Check for damage in your home. Disasters can cause extensive damage, sometimes in places you least expect. Look carefully for any potential hazards.
- Use battery-powered lanterns or flashlights when examining buildings. Battery-powered lighting is the safest and easiest and does not present a fire hazard for the user, occupants, or building.
- **DO NOT USE CANDLES.** Candles can easily cause fires. They are quiet and easily forgotten. They can tip over during earthquake aftershocks or in a gust of wind. Candles invite fire play by children.
- Look for fire hazards, such as broken or leaking gas lines, flooded electrical circuits, or submerged furnaces or electrical appliances.
- Check for gas leaks. If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and get everyone outside quickly. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can, and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.
- Look for electrical system damage. If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if

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you smell burning insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice. Electrical equipment should be checked and dried before being returned to service.

- If you have no electricity, take precautions to keep food safe.
- Check for damage to sewage and water lines. If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using the toilets and drains and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid using water from the tap.
- If your tap water is not working or is not safe, ensure that you drink only clean water.
- If you need to dispose of sewage, ensure that you do it properly.
- Clean up spills immediately. Especially important to clean up are spilled medicines, bleach, gasoline, and other flammable liquids.
- Watch for loose plaster and ceilings that could fall.
- Take pictures of the damage, both of the building and its contents, for insurance claims.
- Watch animals closely. Keep all your animals under your direct control. Pets may become disoriented, particularly if the disaster has affected scent markers that normally allow them to find their homes. Pets may be able to escape from your home or your fence may be broken. Be aware of hazards at nose and paw or hoof level, particularly debris, spilled chemicals, fertilizers, and other substances that might not seem to be dangerous to humans. In addition, the behavior of pets may change dramatically after an earthquake, becoming aggressive or defensive, so be aware of their well-being and take measures to protect them from hazards, including displaced wild animals, and to ensure the safety of other people and animals.
- Let your out-of-town contact know you have returned home, and then do not use the telephone again during the emergency period unless it is to report a life-threatening emergency. Telephone lines are frequently overwhelmed in disaster situations. They need to be clear for emergency calls to get through.
- Make sure you have an adequate water supply in case service is cut off. Water is often contaminated after major disasters.
- Stay away from downed power lines and report them immediately. Getting damaged utilities turned off will prevent further injury or damage. If you see downed power lines, set out a flare and stay on the scene to warn others until authorities arrive if possible.