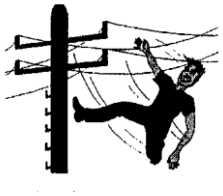
BUCKS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

FOOD SERVICE DISASTER GUIDELINES

Floods, earthquakes, tornadoes and similar natural disasters call for emergency procedures to reestablish a safe, adequate and sanitary food service environment. Flood waters and the mud and sludge they leave behind may contain sewage, manure, and other serious contaminants that call for careful cleaning; other disasters may interrupt electric power or water service. Contact the Bucks County Department of Health for detailed information on reopening requirements.

Personal Safety



In dealing with any disaster, your own safety should be given priority. Protective clothing and safety equipment should be considered. High water, escaping gas, fallen electrical lines, damaged buildings and contamination are among the dangers that must be fully considered before and during the cleanup. Conduct a daylight preliminary survey of the establishment to determine possible hazards and the extent of the damage. Based on this preliminary survey, prepare for cleanup, obtain necessary equipment, arrange for debris removal and provide for your personal safety.

Initial Cleanup

Cleanup and rehabilitation should involve only adults, not minors. Be sure to take a supply of safe drinking water from a known municipal source or a well outside the affected area. Be cautious when entering damaged buildings. Confirm that the utility companies have shut off the facility's electricity and gas. Do not handle any connected electrical cords or appliances if the current is still on. Get assistance before attempting to disconnect equipment or open breaker boxes in flooded rooms. Do not attempt to restart any equipment that has been flooded without first consulting with your service professional or local utility company. Because of the possibility of gas leaks or other flammables, do not light matches or carry flame lanterns into enclosed rooms.

Until the flood waters have completely receded and you are assured that sewage disposal systems are functional, avoid flushing toilets or using other plumbing fixtures. Discharge from a malfunctioning sewage system can increase the physical hazard or make the facility cleanup more difficult. After the flood waters have receded, drain surface pools by ditching or pumping. Drain flooded rooms by natural drainage or by pumping. Wash or flush down walls and floors with clean water, during the drainage or pumping process. As a final cleanup of the walls, floors, cabinets, counters, unmovable equipment and so forth, use plenty of detergent to remove the dirt and stains, followed by a disinfection step using 1/4 cup of chlorinated laundry bleach per gallon of water. During the cleanup operation inside rooms and buildings, provide as much ventilation as possible. You may open windows, doors or vents or provide portable mechanical ventilation.

Water Wells and On-site Sewage Disposal Systems

If your establishment is not served by a community water system or public sewerage system, you may need to rehabilitate the water and sewage systems serving your facility following a flood or other disaster.

A flooded well or one that is being reactivated after an extended period of shutdown must be inspected and disinfected. Any necessary repairs should be made to the well and the well then disinfected. Contact the Bucks county Department of Health for a copy of the Department's guidelines for the disinfection of wells, which contains a detailed description of the procedure to be followed. Following disinfection and before use, a bacteriological analysis of the water should be conducted to confirm the absence of bacteria.

Septic systems may not be functional until the flood water completely recede. The system should be evaluated by your septic system professional and appropriate repairs made before the system is placed back in service. Contact the nearest Bucks County Department of Health District Office if you need assistance in the evaluation of the damage to your system.

Conclusion

When you have cleared the facility of all filth and debris, removed contaminated foods and restored utilities, the facility is ready to be completely sanitized. All equipment, walls, floors, tables, chairs and cabinets should be wiped down with an effective sanitizer. A simple solution can be 2 oz. (1/4 cup) of nonscented chlorine laundry bleach in 1 gallon of water (100 ppm). Other items such as utensils and tableware should all be washed, rinsed and sanitized in the establishment's dishwashing facilities. You should review the Bucks County Department of Health Rules and Regulations for Conducting and Operating Food Establishments for additional food safety requirements. Once this final sanitation step is complete, you will be ready to restock the shelves, contact the Bucks County Department of Health for a re-opening inspection and welcome customers.

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