BUCKS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

TIPS FOR SAFE FLOOD CLEANUP

The aftermath of a flood presents a number of potential dangers for injury and disease. It's important that people working on their homes after the flood use caution to make the long, difficult cleaning process a safe one.

Residents should disinfect everything the flood water has touched. Residents should scrub down walls and any other smooth, hard surfaces that flood waters touched with a water and chlorine bleach solution. One cup of chlorine bleach to 5 gallons of water is recommended. Residents should wear boots and gloves when disinfecting surfaces.

The following recommendations are offered to homeowners who suffered flood damage:

- Be careful entering a flood damaged building. Loose, wet ceiling plaster is heavy and dangerous - knock down hanging plaster before moving around. Watch for holes in the floor and loose boards with exposed nails.
- Once inside, turn off the gas and electricity - wear rubber-soled shoes or boots and rubber gloves and turn off the main switch using a piece of rubber, plastic or dry wood while standing on a dry board to avoid electrocution.
- Take care to protect open scratches or wounds from coming in contact with the contaminated water. Raw sewage and other bacteria in the flood waters can cause infections. If you get a wound, it should be cleaned thoroughly with soap and water; and a tetanus shot may be needed.
- Discard any food that comes in contact with flood waters. Any beverage bottles with twist caps that were under the water should also be thrown out. Dishes and eating and cooking utensils should be thoroughly cleaned with the water and chlorine bleach solution before use.
- Check refrigerated or frozen food carefully if power outages occur. Any frozen foods that have partially or completely defrosted should be used immediately or discarded. Perishable foods kept in a refrigerator that has been off for more than four hours or has warmed to more than 45 degrees Fahrenheit should be discarded.
- Bring drinking water to a rolling boil for two minutes if you suspect it has been contaminated. Citizens are urged to boil water if it is unusually cloudy or has an unusual odor.
- Keep all cleaning and disinfecting products out of the reach of children.
- Never use a gas powered pump or generator in an enclosed place, you could be overcome by carbon monoxide fumes from it.
- Air-dry family treasures such as books, photographs or paintings if you can. If wet books, documents, photographs or textiles can't be air-dried within 48 hours, freeze them if you have a big enough freezer. If not, keep them as cool as possible until air-drying is possible.

- Do not pump the basement until water has gone down - pumping a water-filled basement could result in the walls collapsing.
- Test plumbing and basement drains by pouring in a bucket of water. If the water does not run out, remove the clean-out plug from the trap and rake out the mud with a wire.
- Open doors and windows to ventilate and dry the inside, and wait until all floors, ceilings, walls and furnishings are dry and free of mold and mildew before trying to repair or salvage.
- Do not attempt to repair floors until they are fully dry. Dry wood floors as soon as possible by opening all doors and windows - this should prevent shrinkage and deformation. Once dry, buckled floors may be drawn back into place with nails, and humps may be removed by planing and sanding.
- Remove drawers and clean all mud and dirt from wooden furniture. Be sure to dry furniture slowly and indoors to prevent it from warping from the sun.
- Basement odors, although unpleasant, are usually harmless. If ventilation does not remove them, you may use a disinfectant such as chlorine bleach or pine oil to wash down these areas. However, please read the label for instructions before using any product and provide adequate ventilation.
- Washers, dryers and furnaces can usually be cleaned and tested by qualified electricians. Replacing expensive appliances after a flood is not usually necessary.
- Mattresses, carpets and rugs should be discarded - in most cases, mattresses and rugs become so saturated with contaminated material that cleaning attempts are futile.

The information in this information sheet was taken from a news release by the PA Department of Environmental Protection in January 1996.

For additional information you may call the Bucks County Department of Health.

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