

Public Health Considerations for Flooding after a Fire

Home Safety and Flood Cleanup

- **Ensure that the structure is safe prior to doing work in the affected area. 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.
- **Do not enter your home** if it was damaged by fire or flooding and the authorities have not declared it safe, if you smell gas, or have concerns about structural damage.
- Turn off the electrical power at the main source if there is standing water. Do not turn on power or use an electric tool or appliance while standing in water.
- When re-entering the building, use flashlights instead of lanterns or candles, in case there's a gas leak.
- Do not use generators, pressure washers, charcoal grills, camp stoves, or other fuel-burning devices indoors or in enclosed or partially enclosed areas such as garages, even with doors or windows open.

Inside Your Home:

- Thoroughly clean and disinfect walls, hard-surfaced floor and other household surfaces to reduce risk of disease. Thoroughly disinfect surfaces that come in contact with food and children's play areas. Follow the safety instructions on the bleach you use to create a sanitizing solution.
- Discard contaminated food, wood cutting boards, cosmetics, stuffed animals, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers, and baby toys.
- Do not try to save porous items that have become moldy. Discard carpet, carpet padding, rugs, upholstered furniture, mattresses, box springs, papers and books if you see or smell mold. Replace fiberboard, insulation and disposable filters in your heating/cooling system.
- Hire a professional cleaning company to steam clean and disinfect salvageable furnishings.
- Contact your trash collection company about removing furniture, appliances and bulky furnishings, or take these items directly to a landfill.

Outside Your Home:

- Use care when handling and transporting debris from buildings that are either partially damaged (when salvageable building materials remain) or completely destroyed (when only ash and debris remain).
- Remove vegetation debris and sediment transported by storm water into ditches, natural or manmade ponds or other low lying areas to ensure they function properly. Handle and store vegetation debris in a manner that prevents its release into storm drains, streams, ditches and other surface waters.
- If the property has a propane tank system, turn off the valves if they are accessible and don't appear to be damaged. Tanks, brass and copper fittings and lines can be damaged in a destructive event and can be unsafe. If fire burned the tank, the pressure relief valve probably opened and released the contents. The property owner should contact the propane supplier immediately to have the system inspected, assess the damage and make repairs prior to reuse. Emergency response personnel should be contacted if there is evidence of severe damage or the propane tanks cannot be removed from debris.
- Drain and super-chlorinate pools, hot tubs and spas affected by floodwaters.

Disease Prevention

- Wash your hands often with soap and clean water.
- Be sure you are up-to-date with your tetanus vaccination, ideally before starting cleanup activities. Avoid tetanus and other infections by getting medical attention for a dirty cut or deep puncture wound.
- Flood waters and standing waters pose various risks, including infectious diseases, chemical hazards, and injuries. Use Environmental Protection Agency-registered insect repellents (<https://www.cdc.gov/westnile/prevention/index.html>) to prevent mosquito bites.

Water and Wastewater After a Fire

Your well or septic system could be adversely affected by the fire, power outages, equipment failure from fire damage, or contamination of water supplies. Be prepared, and have plenty of bottled water available for drinking and cooking when you return home.

Wells

Surface disturbance at the well head may indicate a higher risk of problems with the well following flooding. In the long-term, damaged wells may show an increase in turbidity (cloudiness), poor taste and odor, and possibly an increase in bacteria. If you have concerns about water safety, have your water tested. For more information about well water testing, visit www.sjbpublichealth.org/waterquality.

Public Water Systems

If you are on a public water system (i.e.: you pay a water bill) please contact your public water system provider with any questions or concerns.

Septic Systems

Even if your system has escaped fire damage, it still may have been impacted. Loss of vegetation in the area can lead to erosion problems that could damage your leach field. Look for signs of erosion (such as loss of dirt or gullyng) and take steps to divert drainage around the area of the absorption bed. Bales of straw will provide temporary relief, but reseeding of grasses and wildflowers will help anchor the soil long-term.

Considerations for resuming use of your septic system:

- Continue to use your system if there are no signs of damage.
- Discontinue flushing or using sinks if drains are backing up, your lift station has no power, or your system has surfacing effluent in the soil treatment area. If the system is malfunctioning contact San Juan Basin Public Health, for guidance and instruction regarding repair and restoration of the system.

For more information contact Environmental Health staff at San Juan Basin Public Health at 970-335-2052, send an email to EH@sjbpublichealth.org, or visit sjbpublichealth.org/eh.

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