

Health and Safety Important in Clean-up Following October Floods

COLUMBIA, S.C. (October 10, 2015, 4:40 p.m.) -- As people start cleaning up the mess left behind by severe flooding, they need to take added steps to protect their own health and safety.

Assume everything touched by flood water is contaminated and will have to be disinfected. Most clean-up can be done with household cleaning products, but always read and follow label directions. Remember to frequently wash your hands during the clean-up and wear sturdy shoes to prevent falls on the slippery silt and mud left behind.

If there has been a backflow of sewage into the house, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Remove and discard contaminated household materials that cannot be disinfected, such as wallcoverings, cloth, rugs and drywall.

Walls, hard-surface floors and many other household surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water and disinfected with a solution of one cup bleach to five gallons of water. Be particularly careful to thoroughly disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with food, such as counter tops, pantry shelves, refrigerators, etc. Areas where small children play should also be carefully cleaned.

Wash all linens and clothing in hot water, or dry clean them. For items that cannot be washed, such as mattresses and upholstered furniture, air dry them in the sun and then spray them thoroughly with a disinfectant. Steam clean all carpeting.

In addition:

- Always wear waterproof gloves when working with cleaning solutions.
- Apply cleaner and give it time to work before you mop or sponge it up.
- After cleaning a room or item, go over it again with disinfectant to kill germs and odor left by flood water.
- Tackle one room at a time. A two-bucket method is most effective: one bucket for the cleaning solution and a second for the rinse water.
- Rinse out sponge, mop or cleaning cloth in the rinse bucket.
- Replace rinse water frequently.
- Clean with non-sudsing household cleaners or laundry detergent.
- Disinfect using household disinfectants, such as pine oil or 1/4 cup (two ounces) of liquid chlorine bleach mixed in 1 gallon of water.
- Remove mildew with household mildew cleaner or washing soda or trisodium phosphate (five tablespoons per gallon of water) or 1/4 cup (two ounces) of laundry bleach in one gallon of water.

Cleaning Supplies Check List:

- Brooms, mops, brushes, sponges
- Buckets, hose
- Rubber gloves
- Rags
- Cleaning solutions
- Disinfectants
- Lubricating oil
- Trash bags
- Hair dryer

For more information on cleaning up following a flood, contact your local Emergency Management office, health department or American Red Cross chapter. On the internet: www.redcross.org or www.FEMA.GOV.

Here are some other health and safety tips from the South Carolina Emergency Management:

- Conserve water if your septic system has flooded.
- To prevent mosquitoes, empty items that hold water such as birdbaths, old tires, flower pots and buckets; put screens over rain barrels.
- If the pilot light on your natural gas furnace, hot-water heater or stove goes out, have it relit by a professional service representative.