

Floodwatch Tips

Information for homeowners

In order to minimize flood damage, homeowners should take precautions, especially if they live in a flood-prone area. The following information is intended to guide homeowners in preparing for a flood and in cleaning their homes after a flood.

For information that is more detailed contact your local municipality or the British Columbia Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

➤ **Preparing for a flood**

- **Do you have an Emergency Plan?**

An emergency plan will help you and your family know what to do in case of an emergency. The Government of Canada's online tool can help you write your plan.

<https://www.getprepared.gc.ca/index-en.aspx>

- **Do you have an Emergency Kit?**

In an emergency, you will need basic supplies allowing your family to be self-sufficient. The kit should have enough food, water and medical supplies for each member of your family to last at least 72 hours.

- **How can I reduce flood damage?**

It is important to remember that floodwaters are very dirty and items that have been in contact with the water may have to be discarded. Flooding may result in the loss of power, the loss of a safe water supply and cause sewer back-ups.

To minimize damage:

- You may consider moving furniture, electrical appliances and other belongings above the anticipated flood level.
- Move dangerous chemicals (e.g. pesticides and insecticides) above the anticipated flood level to reduce the danger of chemical contamination and personal injury.
- Take special precautions to safeguard electrical, natural gas or propane heating equipment. If there is time, consult your supplier for instructions.
- Turn off the furnace, the outside natural gas valve and the electricity. Know how to do this properly and safely.

➤ After the flood

It is important to remember:

- Floodwaters are likely to be polluted with sewage and other contaminants; they are a threat to the health of everyone in a flooded area.
- Proper cleanup is important.
- It is important to restore your home as soon as possible to protect your health and prevent further damage.

When can I return home?

You should not return home until local emergency officials announce that the emergency is over and it is safe to do so. Make sure that:

- You have a supply of safe water.
- You have properly functioning toilet facilities.
- All flood-contaminated rooms have been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- If your home receives well water or uses an on-site sewage disposal system, please refer to "Private Drinking Water Supplies: What to Do After a Flood", "Disinfection of a Well After Flooding", and "Flood Information Regarding On-Site Sewage Disposal Systems" from Fraser Health.

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To minimize potential injury you should consider the following:

- Avoid standing water as it may contain unseen hazards.
- Do not turn on the main gas valve until instructed to do so by FortisBC or a licensed gas service technician.
- Do not use flooded appliances (gas/electric), electrical outlets, switch boxes or fuse-breaker panels until inspected by a qualified technician.
- Do not use wood, gas or electrical heating systems until inspected by a qualified technician.
- If you lose power during or after a flood, never use a gas oven, range, barbeque, hibachi or portable propane heater to heat your home. These units use up the oxygen and give off carbon monoxide, which can cause suffocation and death if used indoors.

What should I do when returning home?

- Return to your home when notified by the local emergency operations center.
- Check your home for structural safety before entering. Look for buckled walls and floors.
- Call your municipal engineering or building department for an inspection before re-entering or follow directions from the local emergency operations center.
- Call BC Hydro or have an electrician inspect and check for electrical hazards before you re-enter your facility, especially if the electricity was not shut off before evacuation.
- If you smell gas or suspect a leak, leave immediately. Call FortisBC or the local Fire Department. Do not re-enter until you are told it is safe to do so.

➤ Cleaning my home after the flood

The basic steps to cleaning up after a flood are: remove standing water, remove mud, tear out any walls if needed, clean up and disinfect. Dry the house and contents quickly in order to minimize the growth of bacteria and mould.

"Consider hiring a professional restoration company"

- Wear personal protective equipment such as a face mask, gloves and rubber boots.
- Remove all water, mud and other debris.
- Break out walls and remove drywall, wood panelling and insulation at least 50cm (20 inches) above the high water line.
- Flood-soaked carpets and underlay must be removed and discarded.
- Wash all walls, floors, windows and ceilings using soap and potable water.
- Rinse surfaces with potable water and then sanitize all walls, floors, windows and ceilings using a sanitizing solution.
- You can make your own sanitizing solution by adding 1 litre (4 cups) of household bleach to 25 litres (5 gallons) of water (BC Health File Clean-Up After a Flood, December 2011 which is available on the internet at <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/services-and-resources/healthlinkbc-files>).
- Thoroughly wash and sanitize all household surfaces, appliances, children's play equipment and toys. Stuffed toys may need to be discarded if they cannot be properly sanitized.
- Increase ventilation and decrease humidity by opening windows and doors.

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What to keep or discard

You will have to use your judgement depending on the severity of the flood. Generally, anything that has been contaminated by sewage or soaked for a long time should be thrown out. Porous items cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized and should be discarded.

Household Items	Food and Medicine
Discard: ▪ Drywall and Insulation. ▪ Carpeting and underlay. ▪ Mattresses and box springs. ▪ Pillows (feather or synthetic). ▪ Particleboard furniture, stuffed toys, paper, books and less expensive items. ▪ Furniture coverings, padding and cushions. ▪ Cosmetics and toiletries. Keep: ▪ Frames of good quality wood furniture. ▪ Washable clothes. ▪ Valuable papers. ▪ Appliances (assessed by qualified technician).	Discard: Throw out all food and medicine exposed to flood water, such as: ▪ Contents of your freezer and refrigerator. ▪ All boxed foods. ▪ All bottled drinks and products in jars (including home preserves) with screw top lids, snap-lids, crimped-cap and pull-top containers (including liquor). These containers cannot be properly disinfected. ▪ Cans that are dented, leaking, bulging or rusting. ▪ Refrigerated foods that were not exposed to flood water but reached a temperature above 4°C. Keep: ▪ Undamaged commercially canned goods in all metal containers (wash and sanitize cans). Do not keep screw top canned goods. ▪ Refrigerated foods that were not exposed to flood water and remained below 4°C.

"If in doubt, Throw it out"

To contact the local Environmental Health Office by phone,
please call

Population Public Health Central Call Centre at:

604-587-3936

and request to be connected to your local area office.

Fraser Health: www.fraserhealth.ca/healthprotection