

Returning to Flood Affected Buildings

Introduction

In most cases, people will want to return to their homes as soon as possible after the flood waters have receded. While this should be encouraged, residents should only return once basic needs are available and the site is cleared of any hazards and declared safe by the relevant government agency.^{1,2}

Public health significance

Services such as gas and electricity may have been damaged during the flood and may be hazardous to residents if attempted to be used before being checked by the authority. Wild animals, snakes and spiders may have been trapped in the building as the flood waters entered and be a hazard to unsuspecting residents.

Pets and other animals may have died in the building and need to be removed. Food may have been affected by the floodwater. Seek advice from your local council's environmental health officer before eating suspect food.

Action to take to assist in making the building habitable

- Ensure gas, electricity, water and sewerage have been checked by the relevant authorities before reusing.
- Ensure all individuals take adequate precautions and wear suitable protective clothing when cleaning up.
- Drain, clean and dry out the building as soon as possible.
- Remove all wet and damp fittings (ie. Carpets, furniture).
- Check for trapped water and mud cavities.
- Check flooring for swelling.
- Increase airflow under house.
- Remove hollow doors.
- Ignore mould growth until the area is completely dry and then remove with bleach.
- Disinfect where necessary.

¹Refer to information on how to "Prepare for cyclone, storm, flood and tsunami now!" at the Emergency Management Queensland website (see "Related Links" below).

²Refer to Fact Sheets designed to inform home owners about the steps to follow when repairing damage caused to their home by natural disasters such as fires, floods, storms or cyclones at the Building Services Authority website (see "Related Links" below).

Acknowledgement:

Information for this document was sourced from: Smith, G. 1999, "Floods: An environmental health practitioner's guide", National Environmental Health Forum.

Related links:

- Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ) at website:
www.emergency.qld.gov.au/emq/css/beprepared.asp
- Emergency Management Australia Community Awareness Publications at website:
www.ema.gov.au/www/emaweb/emaweb.nsf/Page/Publications
- Building Services Authority (BSA) at website:
www.bsa.qld.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx