

# In the wake of a fire or flood

By Scott Gladish

Emergency Contractors can be on the scene within minutes of a flood, fire or other disaster. Here are some important tips you and your family should heed if an emergency strikes.

- Electrical power and natural gas or propane tanks should be shut off to avoid fire, electrocution or explosions. Try to return to your home during the daytime so that you do not have to use any lights. Use battery-powered flashlights and lanterns, rather than candles, gas lanterns or torches. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, leave the house immediately and call the fire department.
- Your electrical system may also be damaged. If you see frayed wiring or sparks, or if there is an odor of something burning but no visible fire, you should immediately shut off the electrical system at the circuit breaker.
- Avoid any downed power lines, particularly those in water. Avoid wading in standing water, which also may contain glass or metal fragments.
- You should consult your utility company about using electrical equipment, including power generators.
- Walls, hard-surfaced floors and many other household surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water and disinfected with a solution of 1 cup of bleach to 5 gallons of water. Be particularly careful to thoroughly disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with food, such as countertops, pantry shelves, refrigerators, etc. Steam clean all carpeting. 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 wall coverings, cloth, rugs and drywall.
- When returning to a home that has been flooded, be aware that mold may be present and may be a health risk for your family. Clean up and dry out the building quickly (within 24 to 48 hours). Open doors and windows. Use fans to dry out the building. Remove all porous items that have been wet for more than 48 hours and that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried. These items can remain a source of mold growth and should be removed from the home. Porous, non-cleanable items include carpeting and carpet padding, upholstery, wallpaper, drywall, floor and ceiling tiles, insulation material, some clothing, leather, paper, wood and food. Removal and cleaning are important because even dead mold may cause allergic reactions in some people.

*Emergency Contractors strongly recommends that you learn about these risks before a disaster strikes – and not when you are caught in the middle of a stressful crisis. To learn how to design an emergency plan, please contact us at (508) 888-7750 or [info@emergencycontractors.com](mailto:info@emergencycontractors.com).*