Hurricane Safety – Clean Up Meeting Kit



WHAT'S AT STAKE

The aftermath of a hurricane presents a unique set of dangers. While the storm itself may have passed, the risks remain high during the cleanup phase. We're talking about hazards that can lead to serious injuries and illnesses, impacting not only your physical health but also your ability to return to normalcy.

Think about it: downed power lines can cause electrocution, fallen trees can cause crushing injuries, and contaminated floodwater can spread disease. These aren't just minor inconveniences; they can have long-lasting consequences. It's also important to remember that cleanup efforts often take place in challenging conditions, such as extreme heat and humidity, which can increase the risk of heat-related illnesses. This isn't just about getting the job done quickly; it's about getting it done safely so everyone can return to their lives without further harm.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Post-hurricane cleanup throws a lot of hazards our way. One of the biggest dangers is downed power lines. These are extremely dangerous and can cause fatal electrocution. Never, ever touch a downed power line or anything it's touching, like trees, fences, or even puddles. Assume every downed wire is live.

Then there are fallen trees and limbs. These can be unstable and shift or fall unexpectedly, causing serious injuries if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time. Even seemingly small branches can be dangerous if they fall from a height. Debris is another major concern. Think broken glass, nails, sharp metal, and all sorts of other sharp objects scattered everywhere. This kind of debris can cause cuts, punctures, and other injuries if you're not careful.

Contaminated floodwaters are also a serious health risk. Floodwaters can carry sewage, chemicals, and other nasty stuff that can make you sick. Infections, rashes, and other illnesses are common after exposure to contaminated floodwaters. We also must consider structural damage. Buildings and other structures might be weakened or unstable after a hurricane, making them prone to collapse. Entering damaged buildings is extremely dangerous.

Finally, let's talk about carbon monoxide and heat. Improper use of generators indoors or in poorly ventilated areas can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning, which can be fatal. Cleanup work is physically demanding, especially in hot and humid weather, which significantly increases the risk of heat exhaustion and heatstroke.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Before You Start Cleaning:

- Assess the Situation: Before you even think about picking up a single piece of debris, take a good look around. Assess the area for potential hazards. Look for downed power lines—stay far away and report them immediately. Check for unstable structures, like leaning walls or damaged roofs. And be aware of any signs of contaminated floodwaters, like discolouration or a foul odour. This initial assessment is crucial for identifying and avoiding potential dangers.

Gear Up with the Right PPE

This is your first line of defense against injuries and illnesses. Make sure you have the right gear and use it consistently:

- **Work Gloves:** Heavy-duty work gloves are essential for protecting your hands from cuts, punctures, and abrasions from sharp debris.
- **Sturdy Work Boots:** Wear sturdy, waterproof work boots with good ankle support. This will protect your feet and ankles from injuries and keep them dry if you're working in wet conditions.
- **Eye Protection:** Safety glasses or goggles are a must to protect your eyes from flying debris, dust, and other particles.
- **Long Pants and Long Sleeves:** Wear long pants and long sleeves to protect your skin from cuts, scrapes, insect bites, and contact with contaminated materials.
- **Respirator or Dust Mask:** A respirator or dust mask can protect your lungs from dust, mold spores, and other airborne particles that are common after a hurricane. If dealing with mold, a proper respirator is crucial.
- **Waterproof Boots (If Working in Floodwaters):** If you must enter floodwaters, wear waterproof boots to protect your feet from contamination.

Staying Safe Around Hazards:

Never touch downed power lines or anything they're touching. Downed power lines are a major concern after a hurricane. They can be hard to see, especially if they're tangled in trees or debris. It's best to assume they are energized and extremely dangerous. Report them to the power company right away. When you're dealing with debris, be extra careful. There could be broken glass, nails, sharp metal, and all sorts of other hazards hidden amongst the rubble. Use tools like shovels, rakes, and tongs to pick things up, and avoid using your hands directly. And if you must work in or around floodwaters, try to avoid wading in them altogether. Floodwater can be contaminated with all sorts of nasty stuff. If you must enter the water, wear waterproof boots and gloves, and be sure to wash up thoroughly afterward.

Other Important Considerations:

Be aware of displaced wildlife like snakes, insects, and other animals that may be seeking shelter after the storm. Be cautious when moving debris and avoid contact with wildlife. If possible, work with a buddy. This way, if someone gets injured, there's someone there to help and call for assistance.

FINAL WORD

The most important thing to remember is that safety comes first. Cleanup can be a long and challenging process, but it's crucial to take the time to do it safely. Don't rush, wear the proper PPE, and be aware of your surroundings.