



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 1, 2012

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Virginia Department of Health Offers Tips to Prevent Injuries and Food-borne Illness after Severe Weather

(RICHMOND, Va.) — People in the areas affected by the recent severe weather will continue to face a number of hazards associated with cleanup activities. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) offers the following safety tips:

Wear Protective Gear

- For most cleanup work, wear hard hats, goggles, heavy work gloves and watertight boots with steel toe and insole (not just steel shank).
- Wear earplugs or protective headphones to reduce risk from equipment noise.

Reduce Risk of Heat Exhaustion

While cleaning up after a severe storm during excessive heat, you are at risk for developing health problems. To reduce heat-related risks:

- Drink a glass of fluid every 15 to 20 minutes.
- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- Work during the cooler hours of the day.
- Equipment such as chain saws may cause ringing in the ears and subsequent hearing damage.
- Wear eye goggles while removing or cleaning up debris to prevent eye injuries.

Prevent Muscle and Bone Injury

Special attention is needed to avoid back injuries associated with manual lifting and handling of debris and building materials. To help prevent muscle and bone injury:

- Use teams of two or more to move bulky objects.
- Avoid lifting any material that weighs more than 50 pounds.
- Use proper automated-assist lifting devices.
- Use caution or seek professional assistance when removing fallen trees, cleaning up debris or using equipment, such as chain saws.
- Wear eye goggles while removing or cleaning up debris to prevent eye injuries.

Food Safety Precautions

In the case of an electrical outage, it is important to take careful precautions to ensure food safety. The risk of food poisoning is heightened when refrigerators and ovens are inoperable.

- Discard any food that has been at room temperature for two hours or more, and any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture. Just remember, “When in doubt, throw it out!”
- If your power has been out for 48 hours or longer – and you have NOT made other provisions for keeping your food at or below 41 degrees F – do not eat it.
- If you have made other provisions to keep your food cold, make sure the temperature of the food is 41 degrees F or below before cooking or eating it.
- A full cooler or freezer will maintain its cold temperatures longer than one that is partially filled, so it is important to pack plenty of extra ice or freezer packs to insure a constant cold temperature.
- Depending on the type of cooler you are using, ice will need to be replaced at least every 24 hours.

Avoid Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that is poisonous to breathe. During storm cleanup, operate gasoline-powered generators and outdoors. Never bring them indoors.

Candle Safety

- Use flashlights instead of candles whenever possible.
- Keep candles away from items that can catch fire such as clothing, books, curtains, or flammable liquids.
- Use candle holders that are sturdy, won't tip over easily and are made from a material that can't burn.
- Keep candles out of reach of children.
- Avoid carrying a lit candle.
- Never use a candle for a light when checking pilot lights or fueling equipment.

Mosquito-borne Disease Prevention

- Protect against mosquito bites by wearing long, loose and light-colored clothing.

- Use insect repellent with the smallest percentage of DEET necessary for the length of time you are exposed to mosquitoes, but no more than 50 percent for adults and 30 percent for children under 12.
- Turn over or remove containers in your yard where water collects, such as toys, plant trays and buckets.

Prevent Fatigue-Related Injuries

Continued long hours of work combined with exhaustion can create a highly stressful situation during cleanup. People working on storm cleanup can reduce their risk of injury and illness in several ways:

- Set priorities for cleanup tasks and pace the work.
- Avoid physical exhaustion.
- Resume a normal sleep schedule as quickly as possible.
- Be alert to emotional exhaustion or strain.
- Consult family members, friends or professionals for emotional support.

The VDH website also contains information on pre-storm planning, post-storm recovery and the prevention of heat-related illnesses. Please visit www.vdh.virginia.gov. Click “*Hurricane Season 2012*” for more information on food safety, drinking water safety, post-storm cleanup and prevention of illnesses and injuries. Or click “Extreme Heat” for information on staying cool and hydrated as well as heat stroke and heat exhaustion.

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