

## STEP THREE: RE-ENTERING YOUR HOME



If you have been forced to leave your home because of the disaster, you will want to go back in, if possible, to retrieve possessions and take stock of damage. Being well prepared and proceeding cautiously will help you stay healthy and avoid injury when you re-enter your home.

- **Stay out of damaged buildings:** return only when authorities say it is safe. Stay tuned to your local radio or television station.
- **Assemble the things you may need:**
  - Battery-powered lantern or flashlight (nothing flammable)
  - Camera or video camera and notebook to record damage for insurance purposes
  - First aid kit (in case of injury)
  - Tools: crowbar, hammer, saw, etc.
  - Drinking water
  - Trash bags
  - Hard hat and gloves (rubber and heavy gloves)
  - Hard-soled boots or shoes
  - If your home was flooded, bring large containers to soak bedding and clothing, and lines to hang them on to dry
  - Pails, mops and sponges, if your home was flooded
  - Liquid chlorine bleach (household laundry bleach containing 5-6% chlorine)
- **Before going inside, walk carefully around the outside of the house.** Carefully check for signs of damage or danger.
  - Look for loose power lines. Stay away from fallen or damaged electrical wires.
  - If you smell the “rotten eggs” odour that is the tell-tale sign of gas, call the gas company right away. If the gas meter is outside, turn it off at the main valve. Do not go inside.
  - Check the foundation, roof, chimney and steps for damage. Look for broken or cracked basement walls. Unnoticed damage could lead to fire or injury from falling debris.
  - Don't go inside if there is standing water around the house. The water could carry electric current.
  - Take pictures of the outside damage for insurance claims.
- **When entering the building, use extreme caution.** Move carefully inside the house. Building damage may have occurred where you least expect it. Carefully watch every step you take.
- **Check for gas leaks.** If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas, using the outside main valve if you can, and call the gas company. **NOTE:** If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must only be turned back on by a professional.
- **Examine walls, floors, doors, staircases and windows to make sure the building is not in danger of collapsing.**
- **Look for electrical system damage.** If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell burning insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker – if you determine that it is safe to do so. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, don't do it – call an electrician or your local electric company for advice.
- **Check for sewage and water line damage.** If you suspect sewage lines are damaged inside your property, avoid using the toilets and call a plumber (for damage outside your property, you may need to call the local authority). If water pipes are damaged, contact the local authority and avoid using water from the tap. *(See more on this topic, including well water and sewage disposal, in STEP FOUR in this booklet.)*
- **Take pictures of the damage inside,** both to the house and its contents, for insurance claims.
- **Watch for animals.** Small animals that have been flooded or burned out of their homes may seek shelter in yours. Use a pole or stick to turn items over, watching for animals. Use caution when opening drawers and cupboards.
- **Disinfect standing water.** If your home was flooded, it is important to disinfect all standing water in the home, including the basement. Measure 2 litres (2 quarts) of liquid chlorine bleach and distribute it evenly over any standing water. Stir the bleach and water together as much as possible. Repeat every four to five days for as long as the water remains.
- **Keep track of your expenses and time in cleaning up.** Keep all receipts from cleaning supplies, rental equipment and any cleaning firms you hire. Record the number of hours you and your family or friends spend cleaning up the property each day. These records will be useful if you are making an insurance claim or applying for disaster financial assistance.