

Protecting Yourself During High Wind Storm Cleanup



Your first concern is life safety!

Protect yourself and family first, before protection of property. Hazardous situations should be avoided except by a licensed professional or trained individual. Do not attempt actions which may put you in danger, such as entering an unstable building to search for valuables or crossing flood waters. When in doubt, **don't do it**: contact local emergency services!

What to wear for disaster cleanup

Hard hat, heavy work gloves, waterproof boots with steel toe and insole, eye protection, long pants & shirt, hearing protection, N95 respirator.

General tips

Be prepared to deal with injuries, work in teams, be able to communicate if you need help, stay hydrated with safe water, take frequent breaks, work in daylight if possible. Children should not participate in disaster cleanup!

Who to contact when you have concerns

Your local emergency services

Call 911 to contact your local emergency services if you are concerned about situations that could be immediately hazardous to life including: damaged utilities, unstable structures, unsecured hazardous chemicals (including strange odors), discovery of a trapped person, etc.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

Ph. 800-321-OSHA (6742); www.osha.gov. OSHA sets and enforces workplace health and safety laws.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Ph. 800-621-FEMA (3362); www.fema.gov. FEMA helps with disaster response.

Traumatic Stress

Traumatic events such as a wind storm can cause death or serious injury, anxiety, terror, shock, emotional numbness and social disconnection. Individuals with prolonged traumatic stress that disrupts daily functioning should consult a mental health professional.

Common post-disaster hazards and safety measures

Unstable structures/dangerous walking and work surfaces

Buildings, debris piles, standing water, cracks/voids in ground, recent fire

- Unstable ground or flooring could collapse: walk/work only on stable surfaces
- Never assume that damaged structures or ground are stable
- Leave immediately if you hear shifting or unusual noises – A COLLAPSE MAY BE OCCURRING
- Do not work where smoldering materials are on/beneath surfaces – report to fire department
- Watch for fall hazards to other levels and entrapment hazards

Damaged utilities

- Can cause electric shock, poisoning, explosions, fires, burns, and death
- Stay away from downed power lines. Report downed lines and assume they are live
- Call 911 if you suspect damaged utilities, do not enter area
- Fuel leaks will have a distinct odor (gasoline, oil, rotten eggs)
- Electrical contact can cause falls

Debris Removal

- Do not handle broken/leaking chemical containers
- Do not remove debris that may destabilize piles or structures
- Work in teams or use equipment for heavy objects
- Segregate debris according to FEMA or local/state requirements

Common post-disaster hazards and safety measures

Portable Generators

Hazards include CO poisoning and electrocution.

- Follow manufacturer's recommendations and instructions
- Use an electrician to assist in installation and start-up activities
- If using gasoline- and diesel-powered portable generators, switch the main breaker or fuse on the service panel to the "off" position before starting the generator
- Do not use in wet conditions
- When refueling, turn off and wait for motor to cool or use appropriate funnel to prevent spills onto hot engine

Carbon Monoxide (CO)

Carbon Monoxide has no warning properties; it is a colorless, odorless gas that can kill you!

- Symptoms: Headache, dizziness, drowsiness, or nausea progressing to vomiting, loss of consciousness.
- Be careful when working near gasoline, diesel or propane-powered equipment and don't use indoors

Harmful Dusts

Dusts may have asbestos, heavy metals, silica or other toxic materials. Consult a disaster safety officer.

If you must disturb dust:

- Use water to mist material and keep it wet
- Use High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) vacuum
- Use appropriate respirator
- Do not use common shopvac that does not have a HEPA filter
- Do not sweep
- Do not use surgical masks because they do not provide adequate protection

Confined Spaces

Wind can damage structures and fall trees creating confined spaces.

- Watch for leaning structures, vehicles, and trees and avoid them
- Entering confined spaces can kill you! Only trained and authorized personnel should enter confined spaces
- If you find a trapped person, call 911 IMMEDIATELY, stay on the line, and do not attempt rescue as you could become the victim

Chainsaw Use

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions
- Sharpen chainsaw blades and lubricate the bar; adjust the tension of the chain
- Wear protective gear including cut-resistant legwear (chainsaw chaps)
- Always cut at the waist level or below
- Avoid contact with utilities or the ground
- Remain at least 2 tree lengths away from anyone felling a tree and 30 feet from anyone operating a chainsaw

Household and Industrial Chemicals

- Do not handle damaged/leaking containers
- Do not handle chemical containers if you are unsure of contents
- Do not handle industrial chemical containers
- Use gloves and safety glasses when handling all hazardous chemicals
- Do not mix chemicals
- Do not place chemicals near open flames/hot surfaces
- Wash skin that may have come into contact with hazardous chemicals

Hand and Portable Power Tools

- Inspect tools and take damaged tools out of service
- Do not work with electricity in wet environments
- Electrical cords/outlets must meet OSHA standards
- Use double insulated tools
- Use GFCIs on all power tools and cords as close to the panel as possible
- Use with proper gauge electric cord
- Electrical systems/equipment that has been in a fire or wet must be evaluated by a qualified electrician before use

Other Post-Disaster Cleanup Hazards

- Injuries to your body from lifting and strain
- Animals, insects, snakes, and harmful plants
- Cuts, punctures, infection especially after flooding
- Vehicle/driving safety
- Eye injuries

Additional Resources:

Protect Your Property from Severe Winds - https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-11/fema_protect-your-property_severe-wind.pdf

Stay Safe during a Severe Storm - <https://www.statefarm.com/simple-insights/residence/ways-to-stay-safe-during-a-severe-wind-event>