



Avoiding Injury after a Natural Disaster

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During a natural disaster buildings are often damaged, with large amounts of debris falling onto footpaths and roads. Often people return home to sort through the debris and damaged buildings, and clean up. There are many safety hazards associated with this. Following these guidelines will reduce the risk of injury.

Avoiding cuts and wounds

There is a high risk of cuts and wounds after natural disasters. Be extremely careful to avoid cuts from debris. These can result in tetanus or other infections. Prompt first aid can help small wounds heal and prevent infection.

Seek medical attention as soon as possible if the following occur:

- There is a foreign object embedded in the wound.
- The wound is at special risk of infection (such as a dog bite or a puncture by a dirty object).
- A wound shows signs of becoming infected (increased pain and soreness, swelling, redness, draining, or you develop a fever).

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death if you breathe it. After a natural disaster, many people often try to use alternative sources of fuel or electricity for heating, cooling, or cooking. CO from these sources can build up, which can be extremely dangerous.

Tips to prevent CO poisoning:

- Never use generators, pressure washers, grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, or charcoal-burning devices inside a closed space (e.g. in your home or in a tent).
- If you must use the devices, use them outside, well away from open windows, doors, or vents.
- Don't heat your house with a gas oven.
- Seek prompt medical attention if you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning and are feeling dizzy, light-headed, or nauseated.

Electrical Hazards

Electrocution may be fatal. If you experience muscle contraction, breathing difficulties or burns seek medical attention immediately.

- Never touch someone who is being electrocuted. Turn off the main supply before attending the person.
- Never make contact with power lines, regardless of whether they are on the ground or intact.
- Do not drive through standing water if downed power lines are in the water.



- If a power line falls across your car while you are driving, stay inside the vehicle and continue to drive away from the line.
- Never turn power on or off, or use an electric tool or appliance, while standing in water.
- If electrical circuits and electrical equipment have gotten wet or are in or near water, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel. However, DO NOT turn off the main breaker or fuse IF you must enter or stand in water to access it.
- If you see frayed wiring or sparks when you restore power, or if there is an odor of something burning (whether fire is visible or not), immediately shut off the electrical system at the main circuit breaker.

Drowning

- Avoid moving water, regardless of depth or speed.
- Do not drive through flooded roads. Cars can be swept away or break down.
- If you have to work in or near floodwater, wear a life jacket. If you are caught in an area where floodwater is rising, wear a life jacket, or wear or keep at hand some other type of flotation device.

Fires

- If possible, use flashlights or other battery-operated lights instead of candles.
- If you must use candles, make sure you put them in safe holders away from curtains, paper, wood, or other flammable items.
- Do not leave a burning candle unattended.
- If you must make a fire for heat or cooking purposes, make it outside (not inside a building or tent).

Gas Leaks

- If you smell gas or suspect a leak, leave the building immediately. Notify emergency authorities. DO NOT turn on the lights, light matches, smoke, or do anything that could cause a spark.
- Do not return until you are told it is safe to do so.

Heat and Cold

- Prevent heat-related illness:
 - Take breaks in shaded areas or in cool rooms.
 - Drink water and nonalcoholic fluids often.
 - Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- When standing or working in water which is cooler than 24 degrees C (75 degrees F):
 - Wear rubber boots.



- Ensure that clothing and boots have adequate insulation.
- Take frequent breaks out of the water.
- Change into dry clothing when possible.
- Do outdoor activities during cooler hours.

Driving

- Avoid driving through water, especially when it is fast moving.
 - As little as 15 cm (6 inches) of water may cause you to lose control of your car or truck.
 - 60cm (2 feet) of water will carry most cars away.
- Do not drive through standing water if fallen power lines or electrical wires are in the water.
- If a power line or electrical wire falls on your car or truck while you are driving, continue to drive away from the wire. Do not turn off the ignition, even if the engine stalls. Do not allow anyone other than emergency workers to approach your car or truck.
- Slow down and drive at a speed that is safe for road and weather conditions.
- Watch out for debris on the road.
- Keep space between you and other drivers.
- Wear your seatbelt at all times.
- Carry basic supplies in your car or truck, such as water, food, blanket, and first aid kit.
- Gasoline is extremely flammable and dangerous. Do not carry extra fuel in your car or truck. If you feel you must carry extra fuel.

Safety tips when carrying flammable fuel:

- Use only metal or plastic containers approved for gasoline storage.
- Do not fill the container all the way to allow for heat expansion.
- To reduce danger from static electricity, fill containers on a flat surface on the ground and NOT in the vehicle.
- After filling containers, tighten all caps, wipe off any spilled fuel, and secure containers to avoid tipping.
- After reaching your destination, remove gasoline containers from your vehicle and store in a well ventilated area. Use the stored gasoline as soon as possible.

When cleaning up a building

- Stay away from damaged buildings or structures until they have been examined and certified as safe by a building inspector or other government authority.
- Return to buildings during daylight hours, when it is easier to avoid hazards, particularly if the electricity is off and you have no lights.



- Leave immediately if you hear shifting or unusual noises that signal that the structure may fall or if you smell gas or suspect a leak.
- Use teams of two or more people to move bulky objects.
- Wear hard hats, goggles, heavy work gloves, and watertight boots with steel toe and insole (not just steel shank) for cleanup work. Wear earplugs or protective headphones to reduce risk from equipment noise.
- Avoid wading in water. Glass, metal fragments, and other debris may be in the water.
- Be cautious of chemicals, propane tanks, and other dangerous materials. Wear protective clothing and gear (for example, a respirator if needed) when handling hazardous materials. Wash skin that may have come in contact with hazardous chemicals.

When using chainsaws:

- Operate, adjust, and maintain the saw according to manufacturer's instructions. Periodically check and adjust the tension of the chain saw blade.
- Wear appropriate protective equipment, such as hard hat, safety glasses, hearing protection, heavy work gloves, and cut-resistant leg wear.
- Avoid contact with power lines.
- Always cut at waist level or below.
- Be sure that bystanders are at a safe distance from cutting activities.
- With an electric chain saw, use extreme caution to avoid electrical shock.
- Take extra care in cutting trees or branches that are bent, twisted, hung up on, or caught under another object during a high wind. If the tree or the branch is suddenly released, it may strike the person cutting it, or a bystander.
- A pressure washer is a power tool that sprays water at high pressures to clean large, sturdy surfaces such as buildings, farm equipment and roads. Pressure washers can be extremely dangerous if used incorrectly. When using a pressure washer, always follow the safety instructions included in the owner's manual.
- Pace yourself and get help to avoid both physical and emotional exhaustion.

References

International SOS - Country Guides - <http://www.internationalsos.com>