

# Protecting Yourself During Post-High Wind Storm Cleanup

Midwest Consortium  
3223 Eden Avenue, PO Box 670056  
Cincinnati, OH 45267-0056  
Telephone: 513-558-0528  
[www.http://eh.uc.edu/mwc/](http://eh.uc.edu/mwc/)



This factsheet is for workers conducting post high wind storm cleanup activities. It provides awareness level information. Hazardous situations, including hazardous material cleanup should not be attempted unless by a authorized, licensed professional company or trained individuals. When in doubt, **don't do it**: contact local emergency services!

## Your first concern is life safety!

Protect yourself and family first, before protection of property. Do not attempt actions which may put you in danger, such as entering an unstable building to search for valuables or crossing pooled or moving flood waters. Contact local emergency services and evacuate to a designated safe location.

## Traumatic Stress

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

## 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 hazardous situations that could be immediately hazardous to life; including damaged utilities, unstable structures, unsecured hazardous chemicals (damaged containers, strange odors, etc.), discovery of trapped person, etc.

#### Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

Ph. 800-321-OSHA (6742); [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov). OSHA sets and enforces workplace health and safety laws. Most workers in the nation fall under OSHA jurisdiction.

#### Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Ph. 800- 621-FEMA (3362); [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

## Common post-disaster hazards and controls

### Health and safety hazards: seek information from local emergency services

- Damaged structures
- Damaged utilities/downed powerlines
- Unstable Debris/ debris piles
- Standing water, cracks in ground, recent fire
- Chemical containers (household or other)
- Asbestos, lead, PCBs if your house was built before 1979
- Mold if your home was affected by water
- Silica from construction materials/soil
- Need for powered equipment or hand tools
- Work around heavy equipment
- Work at heights (falls)
- Hot or cold environments

### Procedure for communicating hazardous materials are present: Yellow Tag

### Unstable structures/dangerous walking and work surfaces including buildings, debris piles, standing water, cracks/voids in ground, recent fire

- Never assume that damaged structures or ground are stable-have it certified safe by a registered professional engineer or architect
- Assess the area and choose the safest path. Unstable ground or flooring could collapse: walk/work on stable surfaces
- Assume all stairs, floors and roofs are unsafe until inspected
- Do not work where smoldering materials are on/beneath surfaces-report to fire department
- Wear protective equipment including hard hats, safety glasses, leather gloves and safety shoes with slip resistant soles
- Watch for fall hazards to other levels and entrapment hazards

### Leave immediately if you hear shifting or unusual noises - A COLLAPSE MAY BE OCCURRING

### Hand and Portable Power Tools

- Inspect tools
- 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
- Always wear eye protection

## Portable Generators

Hazards include CO poisoning and electrocution.

- Follow manufacturer's recommendations, specifications and grounding instructions
- Use a qualified 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. Prolonged or high exposure can lead to death. High risk CO exposure areas include:

- Any activity using gasoline, diesel or propane-powered equipment
- Work near gasoline, diesel or propane equipment
- Debris reduction sites (burning)
- Hot work (cutting, welding) especially in confined spaces

## Harmful Dusts

Dusts created by the storm or during cleanup may have asbestos, heavy metals, silica or other toxic materials. **Consult a qualified disaster safety officer.**

If you must disturb dust use:

- Water to mist material and keep it wet
- High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) vacuum
- Appropriate respirator

Do not use:

- Common shopvac that does not have a HEPA filter
- Do not dry sweep

## Do not use surgical masks because they do not provide adequate protection

## Debris removal

- Wear safety shoes with non-skid soles, safety glasses, leather work gloves, hard hat, long pants and shirt.
- Do not handle broken/leaking chemical containers
- Do not remove debris that may destabilize piles or structures
- Call for heavy equipment for heavy lifting
- Segregate debris according to FEMA or Local/State requirements

## Confined Spaces

High 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 vic-

## Chainsaw Use

Operate, adjust, and maintain the saw according to manufacturer's instructions.

- Sharpening chain saw chains and lubricating the bar and
- Check and adjust the tension of the chain saw blade
- Match the size of chainsaw to the job
- Use safety features such as a chain brake, hand guards, stop switch, chain catcher and a spark arrester

Wear the appropriate protective equipment:

- Hard hat
- Safety glasses/face shield
- Hearing protection
- Heavy work gloves
- Cut-resistant legwear (chain saw chaps)

- Always cut at waist level or below
- Avoid contact with utilities or ground
- Do not place body in line with saw
- Remain at least 2 tree lengths (150 feet) away from anyone felling a tree and 30 feet from anyone operating a chainsaw

**Damaged utilities** can cause electric shock, poisoning, explosions, fires, burns and death

- 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

## Stay away from downed power lines. Report downed lines and assume they are live

## Pressure Washers

Hazards include chemical and thermal burns, lacerations, CO production, projectiles and electric shock. Follow manufacturer recommendations:

- Inspection, training and proper use
- PPE (including insulating rubber boots)
- Chemicals used with the washer
- Use GFCI and proper electrical safety

## 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

## Other Post-Disaster Cleanup Hazards

- Injuries to your body from lifting and strain
- Animals, Insects and Harmful Plants
- Cuts, punctures, infection
- Vehicle/ driving Safety
- Eye injuries
- Fatigue

**Be prepared to deal with injury to you or others: work in teams, be able to communicate, know how to let others know you need help**