

breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice. Electrical equipment should be checked and dried before being returned to service.

- **Check for damage to sewage and water lines.** If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid using water from the tap. You can obtain safe water from undamaged water heaters or by melting ice cubes that were made before the pipes were damaged. Turn off the main water valve before draining water from these sources.
- **Watch out for wild animals, especially poisonous snakes, that may have come into buildings with the floodwater.** Use a stick to poke through debris. Floodwater flushes snakes and many animals out of their homes.
- **Watch for loose plaster, drywall, and ceilings that could fall.**
- **Take pictures of the damage, both of the building and its contents, for insurance claims.**
- **Watch your animals closely.** Keep all your animals under your direct control. Hazardous materials abound in flooded areas. Your pets may be able to escape from your home or through a broken fence. Pets may become disoriented, particularly because flooding usually affects scent markers that normally allow them to find their homes. The behavior of pets may change dramatically after any disruption, becoming aggressive or defensive, so be aware of their well-being and take measures to protect them from hazards, including displaced wild animals, and to ensure the safety of other people and animals.

After returning home, you should:

- **Throw away food and drinking water that has come in contact with floodwater, including canned goods.** It is impossible to know if containers were damaged and the seals compromised. Food contaminated by floodwater can cause severe infections.
- Discard wooden spoons, plastic utensils, and baby bottle nipples and pacifiers if they have been covered by floodwater. There is no way to safely clean them.
- Disinfect metal pans and utensils by boiling them in clean or properly treated water.
- **If water is of questionable purity, boil the water or add bleach to it, and then distill the water if you will be drinking it.** (See Appendix: Drinking Water Safety.) Wells inundated by floodwater should be pumped out and the water tested for purity before drinking. If in doubt, call your local public health authority. Ill health effects often occur when people drink water contaminated with bacteria and germs.
- **Avoid drinking or preparing food with tap water until you are certain it is not contaminated.** Floodwater may have contaminated public water supplies or wells. Local officials should advise you on the safety of the drinking water.
- **Pump out flooded basements gradually (about one-third of the water per day) to avoid structural damage.** If the water is pumped out completely in a short period of time, pressure from water-saturated soil on the outside could cause basement walls to collapse.
- **Service damaged septic tanks, cesspools, pits, and leaching systems as soon as possible.** Damaged sewage systems are health hazards.

For information on portable-generator safety and carbon monoxide poisoning, see Appendix: Portable Generators.