

Flooding and Storm Damage Leave Behind Avoidable Dangers

Illinois started out the summer with a lot of rain, lightning, wind, tornados and flooding. It has been a real mess. You might think the danger is over after the storm passes, but that is when most injuries happen. Flooding is the biggest killer when it comes to weather events, and you are probably thinking that's because of being swept away or drowning. That is just part of the danger of flooding.

When you're dealing with flood-damaged property, keep in mind the possibility of an electrical accident. It is the first thing you should think of before you step foot into a flooded area or storm-damaged building.

Before re-entering storm-damaged buildings or rooms, be sure electric and gas services are turned off. Never attempt to turn off power at the breaker box if you must stand in water to do so. If you can't reach your breaker box safely, call your electric cooperative to shut off power at the meter. Other safety measures recommended by Safe Electricity (www.safeelectricity.org) include:

- Never use electric appliances or touch electric wires, switches or fuses when you're wet or when you're standing in water.
- Keep electric tools and equipment at least 10 feet away from wet surfaces. Do not use electric yard tools if it's raining or the ground is wet.
- If an electrical appliance has been in contact with water, have a professional check it out before it is used. It may need to be repaired or replaced.

It's important to stay clear of downed power lines, and in cleanup efforts, be alert to the possibility that tree limbs or debris may hide an electrical hazard. Assume that any dangling wires you encounter are electrical, and treat all downed or hanging power lines as if they are energized.

If you are driving and come upon a downed power line, stay in your vehicle, warn others to stay away and contact emergency personnel or the local electric cooperative or utility. Also following a storm, be alert at intersections where traffic lights may be out. Stop at all railroad crossings, and treat road intersections with traffic signals as a four-way stop before proceeding with caution.

If after a summer storm or disaster, the power to your home is out for a prolonged period, know and understand important safety precautions and steps to cope with heat until power is restored:

- Dress in loose, lightweight clothing, and stay on the coolest, lowest level of your home.
- Use natural ventilation to cool homes, and consider purchasing battery-powered fans.
- Drink plenty of water. Avoid heavy meals, caffeinated and alcoholic drinks.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed. A freezer that is half full or full can keep foods frozen 24 to 48 hours. Foods should stay safe in an unopened refrigerator up to four hours. If an outage lasts longer than four hours, remove and pack meat, milk and dairy products in a cooler with ice.
- Use safe, alternative food preparations. A barbecue grill is an excellent way to

- prepare food, but a charcoal grill should always be used outside.
- Check on friends and relatives — especially children, seniors, and those with medical conditions or disabilities. These people may need to seek emergency cooling shelters.

During an outage, Safe Electricity also recommends turning off electrical appliances and unplugging major equipment, including air conditioning, computers and televisions. This will help protect equipment that could be damaged by electrical surges, and prevent circuit overloads when power is restored. Leave one light on to indicate that power has been restored. Wait a few minutes then turn on other appliances and equipment one at a time.

If you use a standby generator, make sure a transfer safety switch is used or connect the appliance(s) directly to the generator output through an isolated circuit before you operate it. This prevents electricity from traveling back through the power lines - what's known as "back feed." A back feed creates danger for anyone near lines, particularly crews working to restore power.

For more information on electrical safety, visit www.SafeElectricity.org and www.siec.coop.

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