



Safe homes after an emergency

After a storm, cyclone or flood there are many hazards present. In the event of an emergency, follow the advice of your Local Government. See below for more information on these hazards. Sort waste into separate piles for collection or transport to licensed waste facilities. For example, separate asbestos, chemicals, green waste and general waste into separate piles.

Damaged asbestos

Stay away from any materials that have been severely damaged. Cement sheeting from buildings built before 1990 treat as asbestos (such as fences, eaves and roofs). Broken or cracked asbestos (usually flat or corrugated cement sheeting) that is still well bonded presents a lower risk.

If you choose not to clean up the asbestos material yourself, always use a licensed asbestos removalist.

Protective clothing

When handling asbestos, you should wear protective clothing, including disposable:

- face mask P2 (available from hardware stores) or N95
- coveralls or old clothes
- gloves
- shoe covers or closed shoes/boots that can be wiped clean.

Key actions

Do not handle dust, debris or severely damaged material — contact the Environmental Health Officer (EHO) at your Local Government (LGA) if there is a lot of severely damaged material for advice on removal.

- **Leave it** – ONLY handle small amounts of broken bonded asbestos materials that are still intact (not friable)

- **Wet it** – Use a low pressure hose and spray a light spray/mist – enough to saturate the material. never use high pressure water or air on asbestos.
- **Bag or wrap it** – Place broken pieces into 2 layers of thick plastic bags or double wrap in 0.2 mm thick builder's black plastic (available from hardware stores) and seal openings with strong tape.
- **Tag it** – Label wrapped or bagged items in contrasting colours with the words 'Caution Asbestos', in large writing.
- Once clean-up is complete remove clothing and protective equipment, wipe down re-usable items with a wetted disposable paper towel or wet wipe and bag and tag disposable items.
- Remove your mask last and wash hands.
- Check with the EHO at your LGA where you can dispose of the asbestos waste. Keep separate from other waste materials.

Spilled chemicals

After a storm, cyclone or flood, dangerous goods may have moved or been damaged including, gas cylinders, pool chemicals, workshop chemicals, pesticides and oils.

Protective clothing

- Heavy duty gloves, protective eye wear, respiratory protection, enclosed footwear and long sleeves and pants.

Key actions

- Always follow manufacturer's recommendations when handling chemicals – use the recommended respiratory protection to clean up. If the label is damaged or not accessible look up the manufacturer's material safety data sheet online or seek advice from Poisons Information on 13 11 26.
- Work up-wind from the spill with good ventilation. Remove impacted soils where chemicals have spilled and treat soil as chemical waste.

Spoilt food

When the power goes out, food in your fridge and freezer may start to go off.

Key actions

- Unless power is available within 2 hours of a power cut, seek alternative storage for high-risk foods such as dairy (e.g. an esky with ice).
- If the power has been off for 4 hours or longer throw the food out.
- If you have larger quantities to dispose of such as restaurants or cafes, call the EHO at your LGA.

Damaged septic tanks, or leach drain and sewerage spills

Storms can damage or block wastewater systems. Sinks and toilets may drain slowly, floor drains may overflow, odours may start and sewage become visible outside the home.

Protective clothing

- Wear gloves and enclosed footwear when dealing with septic or sewage spills.

Key actions

- Trained specialists are equipped to pump out, repair or remove septic tanks and leach drains.
- Avoid using toilets, showers or taps if the system is damaged. Consider alternative accommodation until fixed.
- Contact your EHO at your LGA for advice.
- If cleaning up, assume anything touched by waste water is contaminated
- Wash your hands and body thoroughly with warm soapy water especially before eating.
- Wash clothes separately.
- Clean and dry dirty footwear.

Increased mosquito activity

Stagnant water is an excellent breeding ground for mosquitoes, increasing risk of mosquito-borne diseases such as Ross River Virus (RRV).

Protective clothing

- Cover up with long, loose fitting clothing and use insect repellent.

Key actions

- Empty all containers including buckets, bird baths and palm fronds.
- Check rain water tank screens and replace if damaged.
- Ensure swimming pools are not left untreated, otherwise empty pool.

More information

For more detailed information about these environmental health risks and how to reduce health problems, refer to the HealthyWA website:

www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/safe-homes

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

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