



# FLOOD RECOVERY

## Re-entering your home after a flood

The transition from surviving a flood to recovering from one can be uncomfortable and, at times, dangerous. But it doesn't have to be! Guidance and assistance is available from multiple resources for Winnebago County residents. A successful and resilient recovery is possible for anyone.

**Please report property damage and unmet needs caused by the severe weather event to 211 Wisconsin.**

- Online: [211wisconsin.communityos.org/damage-report](https://211wisconsin.communityos.org/damage-report)
- Phone: 2-1-1

Please contact your insurance for guidance on filing damage claims and submitting the proper documentation.



### CRITICAL FLOOD RECOVERY CONSIDERATIONS



Recovery Process



Electrical & Gas Safety



Floodwater Safety



Documentation



Clean Up



Sewage Back Ups



Drinking Water Safety



Food Safety



Fraud



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### RECOVERY PROCESS

Recovering from a disaster is a gradual process and is best when taken slow. Do not try to rush back to your “normal”, as it can quickly become overwhelming, delaying a successful recovery for you and your loved ones.

#### Returning Home:

- DO NOT rush back in.
- Wear proper gear and use extreme caution when examining your residence.
- Look for signs of structural damage, as it may have occurred where you least expect it.
  - Search for loose plaster, drywall, and ceilings that could fall.
- Watch out for gas leaks, loose or dangling electrical power lines, and broken sewer or water pipes. If seen, DO NOT enter your residence and notify officials immediately.
- Animals and insects will instinctively seek cover to escape disaster areas. Be on the lookout for them and be prepared to protect yourself.
- DO NOT enter if floodwater remains inside or around your residence.

If you have any doubts about safety, have your home inspected by a qualified building inspector or structural engineer before entering.

Environmental Protections Agency  
returning home resource





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### RECOVERY PROCESS RESOURCES

To report property damage and unmet needs from the severe weather event, contact: **2-1-1** or [211wisconsin.communityos.org/damage-report](https://211wisconsin.communityos.org/damage-report)



For mental health support, contact:  
**Winnebago County Crisis Line at (920) 233-7707**

For more information on the Winnebago County flooding recovery efforts, go to: [wchd.pub/WinnebagoCountyFlooding](https://wchd.pub/WinnebagoCountyFlooding).

Or, scan the QR code to access the information.





# FLOOD RECOVERY

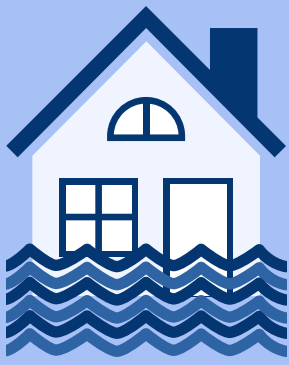
## Re-entering your home after a flood



### ELECTRICAL & GAS SAFETY

Once the residence is deemed safe enough to enter:

- **Turn off the electricity** at the main breaker or fuse box, even if the power is off in your community. That way, you can decide when your home is dry enough to turn it back on.
- **Look for fire hazards.**
  - There may be broken or leaking gas lines, flooded electrical circuits, submerged furnaces, or electrical appliances.
  - Flammable or explosive materials may travel from upstream. Fire is the most frequent hazard following floods.
- **Check for gas leaks.** If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building.
  - Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbor's home.
  - If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.
- **Look for electrical system damage.** If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell burning insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker.
  - If you must 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.



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### FLOODWATER SAFETY

#### Never drive into floodwaters.

- 12 inches of water can sweep a car off the road.
- Most flood fatalities occur in vehicles.

#### Never walk into floodwaters.

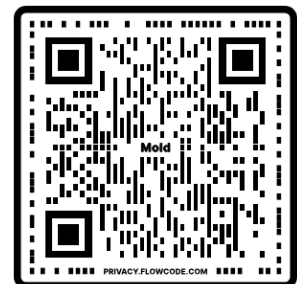
- 6 inches of water can sweep an adult off their feet.
- Floodwaters hide dangers that can cause sickness, injury, or even death.
  - Dangerous chemicals
  - Live wires
  - Sewage
  - Animals & insects
  - Harmful bacteria
  - Sharp objects & debris

#### Get rid of mold:

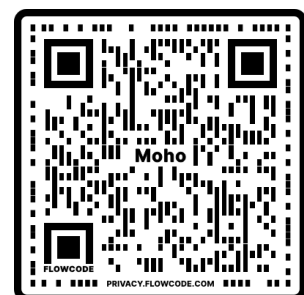
- Mold grows rapidly when items are wet for 48 hours or more. Mold can be removed, cleaned/disinfected, and dried. After a flood, reducing the moisture in the home is key to preventing mold from growing at excessive and high levels.
  - **NOTE:** Mold can trigger an allergic reaction or asthma symptoms, and some people may be more sensitive to mold (e.g., children, immunocompromised).
- Soft items that are saturated with water cannot be thoroughly cleaned or dried out and should be discarded. Removing those items as soon as possible from the home will help reduce the moisture in the air and improve ventilation.
- Items that are 1 foot below the water mark would be seen as being in contact with flood waters.
- Wet mop, muck out, or use pumps or a shop vacuum to remove any water that may be pooling in areas of your home.
- Hard surface items can be cleaned and disinfected.
- Surfaces, such as appliances or electronics, can be dried. Mold cannot grow without moisture. Once an item is dried, the mold might be present, but not growing.

#### Get Rid of Mold

##### English



##### Spanish





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### SEWAGE BACKUPS

- Sewage water contains pathogens that can cause severe illness, bacteria, and viral risks.
- If sewage has backed up in your home, surfaces and items that were in contact with floodwaters are contaminated with sewage.

#### Clean up following a sewage backup:

- Wear the proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when handling sewage-contaminated items.
- Remove any standing sewage.
- All contaminated surfaces and items must be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized.
- Dispose any items that cannot be properly decontaminated.

**Wisconsin Department of Health Services**  
**Flooding: Sewer and Surface Water Hazards**



**Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District**  
**Handling a Sewer Backup**





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### DRINKING WATER SAFETY

#### If your water is from a municipal system:

- Before using it for drinking, food preparation, or showering/brushing teeth, run faucets for 5 minutes.

#### If your water is from a private well:

- Private wells that have been in contact with floodwaters or the top of the well has been submerged, **assume contamination until testing proves otherwise.**
  - Find a source of water that is safe. Use bottled water or boil water by bringing it up to a rolling boil for at least 1 minute.
  - Affected wells **must be chlorinated before testing.** Chlorination can only take place after the water has receded. Chlorination can be done by hired professionals, or you can disinfect yourself. See links below.
- Once your well has been chlorinated and completely flushed from the system, wait approximately 1 week to sample your water:
  - Get a sampling kit by contacting Winnebago County Public Health at (920) 232-3000.
  - Choose a good faucet to sample from (closest indoor water entry point to your house).
  - Disinfect the faucet (with heat or alcohol wipes. Take off the gasket and netting if possible).
  - Run cold water for 5 minutes.
  - Collect your sample.
  - The lab must receive the chilled sample (on ice) within 48 hours of collection.

#### DNR Recommendations For Private Wells Inundated By Flooding



#### Hire A Professional To Chlorinate Your Well



#### “Do It Yourself” Private Well Chlorination Procedures





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### After a flood, throw away these foods:

- Perishable food that has not been refrigerated or frozen properly due to power outages:
  - When in doubt, throw it out. If food is above 40° F for 2 or more hours, discard it.
  - Do not taste food to check if it is safe.
  - A refrigerator will keep food cold for around 4 hours, a full freezer stays cold for 48 hours, a half full freezer stays cold for 24 hours.
- Food that may have come in contact with floodwater or stormwater.
- Food with an unusual smell, color, or texture.
- Food in packages that are not waterproof.
- Food in cardboard containers, including juice/milk/baby formula boxes.
- Food containers with screw caps, snap lids, crimped caps, twist caps, flip tops, and snap tops.
- Home-canned foods and canned foods or food containers that are bulging, open, or damaged.
- Throw out cans or food containers that spurt liquid or foam when you open them or contain food that is discolored, moldy, or smells bad.

### Clean and sanitize food-contact surfaces that have been flooded:

- Throw out wooden cutting boards, baby bottle nipples, and pacifiers if they have come into contact with floodwaters. Sanitizing methods are not effective for removing contaminants in floodwater from these items.
- Clean and sanitize dishes, utensils, and other surfaces that touch food (like refrigerator drawers or kitchen countertops) in a four-step process:
  - **Wash** with hot, soapy water.
  - **Rinse** with clean, safe water.
  - **Sanitize:** Make a solution of 1 cup (8 oz/240 mL) of unscented household chlorine bleach in 5 gallons of clean water. Soak items for 1 minute in the bleach solution (solution should completely cover the items). For items that you can't put in the solution (like countertops), apply solution with a cloth.
  - **Dry:** Allow to air dry.



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### FOOD SAFETY, CONTINUED

#### How to save commercially prepared food:

- Remove labels if possible. Note the expiration date.
- Wipe away dirt or silt.
- Wash cans and pouches with hot, soapy water.
- Rinse cans and pouches with clean, safe water.
- Sanitize cans and pouches in one of two ways: Place them in a solution of 1 cup (8 oz/240 mL) of unscented household bleach in 5 gallons of water for 15 minutes, OR put them in a pot of water, bring to a boil, and continue boiling for 2 minutes.
- Re-label cans or pouches with a marker. Include the expiration date.
- Use food in cans or pouches as soon as possible.



### FOODSHARE BENEFITS

#### **FoodShare Members living in Winnebago County have until May 4, 2026, to request replacement benefits if they lost food due to recent severe storms, flooding, and power outages from April 14 to April 16, 2026.**

You can make your request in whatever way is easiest for you:

- Online: Log in to your [ACCESS](#) ([ACCESS in Spanish](#)), select Food Benefits Replacement Request in the left menu, and answer a few questions about your food loss.
- By phone or in person: Contact your [local or Tribal agency](#) and tell them you need replacement benefits.
- By mail or fax: Complete a [Request for Replacement FoodShare and/or Summer EBT Benefits form, F-00330](#) and submit it to your [local or Tribal agency](#).
- Food benefit replacements will be only approved for the amount that was lost because of the storm. This amount cannot be more than your [monthly household FoodShare benefits](#).





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### DOCUMENTATION

When returning to your residence, it is crucial to take proper documentation of damage for insurance claims.

- Record the date and times of your assessment process.
- Take photos of your:
  - Property
  - Home and its contents
  - Vehicles

### Replacing vital documentation:

Federal documents:

- Social Security cards can be requested online at [ssa.gov](https://ssa.gov) or by filling out an application and bringing it to your local Social Security office with valid identification.
  - Call (800) 772-1213 for assistance.
- Medicare cards can be requested online at [medicare.gov](https://medicare.gov) or by calling (800) 633-4227.
- Passports lost due to a disaster may qualify for a free replacement. Visit [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov) for more information.
- Permanent Resident Cards (Green Cards) can be requested by filing a Form I-90 online or by mail.
  - Complete Form I-90 online at [uscis.gov](https://uscis.gov).
- Military records can be requested online at [archives.gov/veterans](https://archives.gov/veterans).

State and county documents:

- The Winnebago Register of Deeds Office is able to issue copies of the following vital records:
  - Wisconsin Birth Certificates
  - Wisconsin Marriage Certificates
  - Wisconsin Divorce Certificates that occurred on January 1, 2016, or later.
    - Divorce Certificates prior to January 1, 2016, can be ordered online at [vitalchek.com/wistorefront](https://vitalchek.com/wistorefront).
  - Wisconsin Death Certificates that occurred on September 1, 2013, or later.



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### DOCUMENTATION, CONTINUED

#### Replacing vital documentation, continued:

State and county documents, continued:

- Driver's licenses and photo identification cards can be requested at [wisconsindot.gov](http://wisconsindot.gov).

Financial and household records:

- Proof of address/residency can be obtained by contacting your local utility company for a recent bill statement.
- Insurance policy information can be requested by calling your insurance company or agent.
  - Make sure to request a copy of your policy and the Declaration Page.
- Federal tax records can be requested online at [irs.gov](http://irs.gov) or by calling the Internal Revenue Service at (800) 829-1040.
- Medical and prescription records can be obtained by contacting your doctor, clinic, or pharmacy. Medical and prescription records are tracked electronically.
- Real estate and property records can be obtained by contacting your real estate agent, escrow agent, or your mortgage company.
  - Winnebago County residents can view their property information online at [winnebagocountywi.gov/643/Property-Information](http://winnebagocountywi.gov/643/Property-Information).
- U.S. Savings Bonds can be requested from the U.S. Department of Treasury, online at [treasurydirect.gov](http://treasurydirect.gov).



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**Beware of fraud and scams.** After a disaster, criminals often attempt to take advantage of disaster survivors. Winnebago County residents are encouraged to watch out for and report any suspicious activity.

### What to look out for:

FEMA and local official housing and damage assessment inspectors will:

- Never ask for your registration number, they will already have it in their records.
- Always wear an official government badge and identify themselves.
- **Not ask for bank information or payment.**
- Not climb on roofs or enter crawl spaces.

Fake offers of local or federal aid:

- **Do not trust someone who asks for money.** Federal and local government agencies will never charge applicants for disaster assistance or help in filling out applications.
- Do not believe anyone that promises a disaster grant and asks for large cash deposits or advance payments in full.

Fraudulent building contractors:

- Use only licensed and verified local contractors backed by reliable references.
- **Do not pay** more than half the costs of repairs in advance.
- Demand that contractors detail the job to be done with guarantees in **writing**.

Identity theft:

- Criminals may apply for FEMA assistance using stolen survivors' personal identification information.

### Where to report suspected fraud or scams:

- Wisconsin's Consumer Protection Hotline: (800) 422-7128 or [DATCPHotline@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DATCPHotline@wisconsin.gov)
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General: (800) 323-8603
- FEMA Investigations and Inspections Division: [StopFEMAFraud@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:StopFEMAFraud@fema.dhs.gov)
- FEMA Helpline: (800) 621-3362



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### CLEAN UP

#### Begin with the following steps:

- Remove waterlogged items.
- Discard soft items that cannot be cleaned/dried.
- Set aside items that are hard surfaces or can be dried.
- Follow municipal guidelines for disposal.

#### When you are ready to clean items:

- Get supplies: buckets, mop/cloth towels, trash bags, household cleaner (without ammonia) or dish soap/laundry soap, bleach.
- Create your solutions (wash and sanitizer).
- Open windows or use fans to increase ventilation.
- Use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Wash – Rinse – Sanitize – Dry
- Dispose of items that cannot be cleaned.

#### Debris Removal:

- Sort materials per the direction of the municipality.
- Dispose of sandbags properly. Contaminated sandbags should not be reused. Flood-exposed sandbags may contain bacteria, sewage, chemicals, or other hazardous materials.

#### Cleaning and Sanitizing with Bleach after an Emergency

