

RETURNING HOME AFTER DISASTER

University of Illinois Extension t University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign t Disaster

Before Going Into Your Home

After a flood or other natural disaster, going back into your home can be dangerous because of structural, electrical or other hazards. You should also know that some floods have more than one crest or peak. Even though the water looks like it's going down, it may rise again and trap you. Stay tuned to your local radio or TV stations to find out if and when you can safely go back home.

This fact sheet assumes that you have some experience in construction and electrical repair, if you do not have this experience do not try to do this work yourself. Hire a qualified contractor or electrician. If you cannot afford to get professional help check with your Red Cross chapter, your local emergency manager, your Cooperative Extension Unit Leader, or your building department to see if there are any volunteer programs available to you. Each year about 150 people die because of floods. Many of those deaths are because of electrocution or other accidents that happen after the floodwater goes down.

Remember, do not smoke, use candles, gas lanterns or other open flames around your home. Always have someone with you as you check your home and do repairs.

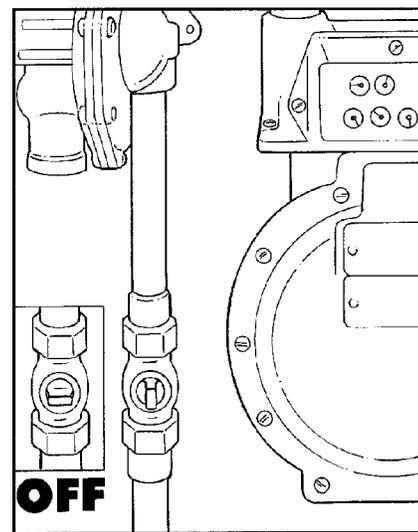
Safety Checks

If water is standing next to the outside walls of your home, don't go in. You won't be able to tell if the building is safe or structurally sound.

C Before you go in, walk carefully around the outside of your house and check for loose power lines and gas leaks. You'll know there is leaking gas if you smell the "rotten eggs" odor that is added to gas. If you suspect a gas leak, leave your home immediately and call the gas company. Leave the door open and if the gas meter is outside, turn off the gas.

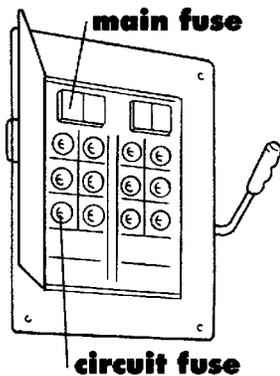
C Check the foundation for cracks or other damage. Examine the porch roofs and overhangs to be sure they still have all their supports. If any supports or pieces of the foundation are missing, or if the ground has washed away, the floors are probably not safe.

Instructions for Turning Off Gas

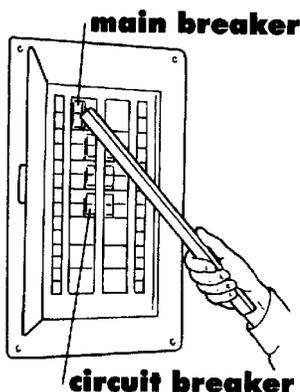


1. Find the valve next to the gas meter. If the valve is parallel to the pipe, the gas is on.
2. Using pliers or a wrench, turn the valve 90 degrees (a quarter turn) until the valve is perpendicular to the pipe. This turns the gas off.
3. If the valve has a hole in the handle, the hole lines up with a hole in the valve body when the gas is shut off. When the holes are lined up, the gas should be off.
4. To make sure the gas is off, write down the numbers on all the dials on the meter. Check the dials in 5 or more minutes. If the numbers have changed, gas is still flowing.
5. If you are not certain whether the gas is off, contact the utility company and stay clear of the area until the gas has stopped flowing.

How to Turn off the Power



1. Stand on a dry spot.
2. If your box has a handle on the side, use a dry wooden stick or pole to pull the handle to OFF.
3. Use the stick to open the door.
4. Carefully pull out the main fuses. Use a dry wooden stick.
5. Unscrew and remove each circuit fuse.



1. Stand on a dry spot.
2. Use a dry wooden stick or pole to open the door.
3. Use the stick to push the main breaker switch to OFF.
4. Use the stick to turn each circuit breaker to OFF.

Instructions for Turning Off Electricity

- C The electricity at your home must be turned off, even if the power company has turned off electricity to the area. You don't want the power company to turn power back on while you are working on it.
- C The electricity must be turned off at the main breaker box or fuse box. Even if the utility company removed your electric meter, this does not always turn off the power.
- C If you have to step in water to get to your electric box, call an electrician.
- C If you can get to your electric box without going through or standing in water, use the following instructions to turn the power off.

Remember, do not smoke, use candles, gas lanterns or other open flames around your home. Always have someone with you as you check your home and do repairs.

For more information, see the American Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency's "Repairing Your Flood Home" publication ARC4477, FEMA 234, August 1992.)

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