

Home Safety Guidelines to Aid with Recent Flooding

May 12, 2009 - The Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) has issued home safety guidelines to aid Kentuckians left with water damage in their homes due to large amounts of water run-off and flooding throughout the state. Public health concerns include mold mitigation and prevention, carbon monoxide exposure and proper food handling and storage.

Mold, fungi that can be found indoors and out, can accumulate in homes affected by flood/water damage. Molds grow best in warm, damp and humid conditions and spreads by making spores.

To recognize the signs of mold, look for discolored walls possibly showing water damage, or green or black spots apparent on walls. Mold also has a musty, earthy smell or a foul stench. Allergy sufferers tend to be most affected by mold exposure.

To decrease exposure and reduce mold in the home, DPH recommends that homeowners keep the humidity level of the home between 40 and 60 percent. The use of an air conditioner or dehumidifier may be used to achieve a lower level of humidity. Always use exhaust fans when showering and cooking. Mold inhibitors for paint are also available from home improvement stores.

When cleaning up small areas affected by mold, use protective glasses or goggles. DPH also recommends wearing rubber boots and waterproof gloves, and wash clothing afterwards. If there is a heavy mold growth area, you may wish to use a basic respirator or suitable mask to prevent breathing the spores. Dispose of gloves and masks after each use.

Other recommendations include:

- Ensure that the area is well ventilated before beginning.
- Remove all previously soaked porous items that have been wet for more than 48 hours and are not able to be cleaned and dried. **Throw water-soaked mattresses away. Do not reuse these.**
- Disinfect hard surfaces; a solution may be mixed of 1 cup of household bleach with 1 gallon of water.
- Contact a mold remediation consultant for severe mold cases.

In addition to mold concerns, carbon monoxide exposure is a serious concern when people begin resorting to alternative energy sources such as generators, propane gas stoves and charcoal grills. DPH officials advise taking steps to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning by following guidelines from the National Center for Environmental Health:

- Don't use a generator, charcoal grill, camp stove or other gasoline or charcoal-burning device inside your home, basement or garage or near a window.
- Don't run a car or truck inside a garage attached to your house, even if you leave the door open.
- Don't burn anything in a stove or fireplace that isn't properly vented.
- Don't heat your house with a gas oven.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning and are experiencing symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning. Early symptoms include headache, nausea, vomiting and fatigue. Carbon monoxide poisoning is treatable.

- Install a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector in your home or replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall for daylight savings time. If the detector sounds, leave your home immediately and call 911.

If you are experiencing symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning or if you have questions, call the Poison Control hot line at (800) 222-1222.

More information about carbon monoxide poisoning can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/co/guidelines.htm>.

Kentuckians should also keep food safety in mind if they have been affected by power outages. This includes keeping freezers closed to maintain the proper temperature for frozen foods. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours and for 24 hours if the freezer is half full.

DPH cautions that a refrigerator will only hold its temperature for about four hours, meaning food items such as milk, dairy products, meats, eggs and leftovers should be placed in a cooler surrounded by ice if the outage lasts for more than four hours. Dry ice can be used to keep refrigerators cold. If the outage lasts for several days, 50 pounds of dry ice should preserve food in an 18-cubic foot full freezer for two days. (You must be careful when handling dry ice. Never touch dry ice with bare hands or breathe its vapors in an enclosed area. Dry ice is frozen carbon dioxide, a gas.

When the refrigerator and/or freezer are operating again, follow these guidelines to decide what to do with foods:

- Refrigerated foods should be safe as long as power is out for no more than four hours.
- Throw out any perishable food in your refrigerator, such as meat, poultry, lunchmeats, fish, dairy products, eggs and any prepared or cooked foods that have been above 40 degrees Fahrenheit for two hours. Bacteria can multiply to unsafe levels under these conditions.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables are safe as long as they are still firm, and there is no evidence of mold or sliminess.
- If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, read the temperature when power comes back on. If the appliance thermometer stored in the freezer reads 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen.
- If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine the safety.
- If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below, it is safe to refreeze.
- Raw meats, poultry, cheese, juices, breads and pastries can be refrozen without losing too much food quality.
- Prepared food, fish, vegetables and fruits in the freezer can be refrozen safely, but food quality may suffer.