



# County of Santa Cruz

## Health Services Agency - Environmental Health

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(831) 454-2022 TDD/TTY - Call 711 <http://www.scceh.org>  
[EnvironmentalHealth@santacruzcounty.us](mailto:EnvironmentalHealth@santacruzcounty.us)



### Flood Event Frequently Asked Questions

#### General Questions

##### **Q1: My home flooded. What should I do?**

**A1:** The first thing you should do is contact your homeowner's insurance to report your loss. They should be able to provide information on how to proceed with rehabilitating your property.

##### **Q2: I do not have homeowner's insurance. What can I do?**

**Q2:** There are resources available that can help you through your loss. Visit the Santa Cruz County Office of Response, Recovery, and Resilience for more information on flood recovery resources at: <https://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/OR3.aspx>. You can also contact the Rainstorm Call Center at (831) 4545-2285 for more information.

#### Home Re-Entry

##### **Q3: I need to make sure I can get my personal belongings, but I think my house is structurally unsafe. What should I do?**

**A3:** Local building departments offer safety assessments of structures affected by mass floods and other mass catastrophes. Below are contact numbers for the local building departments:

County/ Unincorporated (831) 454-3171  
City of Watsonville (831) 768-3060  
City of Capitola (831) 475-7300  
City of Santa Cruz (831) 420-5110  
City of Scotts Valley (831) 440-5640

If they are unable to provide the service themselves, they are still the best agency to advise you.

#### **Q4: I think the house is intact. Is it safe to enter the house?**

**A4:** No. Entering your home after a flood is dangerous.

The following immediate dangers can be present:

- Electrocutation
  - ✓ Power must be shut off until the extent of the damage can be determined. To turn off the power to the entire house, flip off the main breaker. It is usually a double-width switch located at the top of the service panel.
  - ✓ Do not power flooded appliances
- Gas/ Fire
  - ✓ Gas supply line outside must be shut off
  - ✓ Doors must be open to air out the home or building and prevent exposure to accumulation of gases.
  - ✓ Upon entering the building, do not use matches, cigarette lighters or any other open flames, since gas may be trapped inside.
  - ✓ If no gas is detected, use a flashlight to light
- Building/ Structural Stability
  - ✓ The building may have moved or become structurally unsound. Do not enter if you suspect the building is unsafe or unsound.
  - ✓ Look at the foundation and make sure it looks secure
- Sharp Objects
  - ✓ Be mindful of sharp objects like metal, tree debris and broken glass
- Toxic Materials and Gas Tanks
  - ✓ Chemicals and other potentially hazardous materials may have been dispersed on the property. Assess the condition of any containers you come in across before deciding what to do with them.
  - ✓ Propane and other dangerous pressurized gas tanks can pose an additional risk if impacted also. Stay away from tanks or approach them with caution.
  - ✓ If you come across household hazardous waste that needs disposal, please reach out to our DPW, Household Hazardous Waste Program at: [https://dpw.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/Home/RecyclingTrash/HouseholdHazardousWaste\(HHW\).aspx](https://dpw.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/Home/RecyclingTrash/HouseholdHazardousWaste(HHW).aspx)
- Displaced Wildlife
  - ✓ Be mindful of snakes, rodents, and other animals that may have sought shelter on the property

**Q5: What kind of personal protective equipment should I wear when re-entering my home?**

**A5:** Individuals entering a property should wear the following:

- ✓ Waterproof boots or shoes (steel toe)
- ✓ Clothing that protects the skin surface and is weather appropriate
- ✓ N95 respirator/mask if health allows
- ✓ Gloves that protect against physical and chemical hazards
- ✓ Safety glasses

Assume all soil and runoff debris is contaminated, so minimize contact.

**Q6: Is the flood water safe?**

**A6:** No. Assume the flood water is contaminated with everything in it encountered from runoff, including sewage. Consider the flood water unsafe and minimize contact. Do not swim in or ingest the flood water. It may contain a high concentration of bacteria, parasites, and viruses.

**Q7: I got flood water on my skin or eyes. What should I do?**

**A7:** Wash the area with anti-microbial soap and plenty of potable water. Flush your eyes thoroughly with potable water and/or sterile saline solution if it got on your eyes.

**Q8: I have retrieved important heirlooms from my property, how can I clean them?**

**A8:** It is best to throw away soft objects that can grow mold and cannot be easily cleaned. Objects with smooth cleanable surfaces like metal, glass, and plastic can be washed with soap and water, rinsed with potable water, and disinfected with a bleach/water solution of 1 cup of household bleach per 5 gallons of water. Soak the item completely in the bleach solution for at least 1 minute then take it out and allow to air dry.

**Q9: Only a small amount of water entered my house, and my house appears structurally safe. I was able to dry everything quickly. Should I still be concerned?**

**A9:** We encourage you to contact your insurance for consultation and have a remediation company assess your home. While it may appear that damage is minimal, they can verify that this is the case and assist with disinfection of the affected areas. If the exposure is minimal, the following procedure found at the following CDC web site can be used:

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/cleanup/facts.html>

Mold growth is a concern after flooding. Monitor the house for signs of mold growth and treat immediately.

## **Water Quality**

**Q10: My home is on a well and it was submerged in the flood. I flushed the water lines until the water was clear. Is the water safe to drink.**

**A10:** No. Assume the water from the well is contaminated. Visit the Water Instructions on how to treat the well can be found at the Water Resources website at:

<https://scceh.com/NewHome/Programs/WaterResources.aspx>

The Santa Cruz County Water Quality Lab is analyzing water samples for Total and Fecal Coliform at no cost to those impacted by the flood. Request a water sampling kit by calling or e-mailing at: (831) 454-4624; [WaterQuality@santacruzcounty.us](mailto:WaterQuality@santacruzcounty.us)

**Q11: My house has municipal water, but the water is coming out dirty. What should I do?**

**A11:** Follow your local water provider's instructions for how to treat the water lines. They may have issued boil advisories or other recommendations. If none are being provided, run the water for 5-10 minutes to flush out the lines. If you continue to see debris in your water, you may have experienced a local break in the water line. Contact a plumber to make the required repairs. Contact your local water provider if you observe that your neighbors are experiencing the same problem and/ or if after repairs to your water lines, you are still experiencing a problem.

## **Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS)**

**Q12: My Home is served by an onsite wastewater treatment system (OWTS) and my property was flooded, what do I do?**

**A12:** You will need to discontinue the use of your OWTS or conserve water use until conditions dry out. It is best to avoid pumping your septic tank unless your tank is concrete, or you know it has been installed with anti-buoyancy measures in place. Pumping your tank may cause the tank to float out of the ground resulting in damage to the system. A qualified licensed liquid waste hauler may be able to advise you on the best course of action.

A list of licensed liquid waste haulers can be found on our website at:

<http://www.scceh.com/NewHome/Programs/Landuse/QualifiedProfessionals.aspx>

**Q13: How do I find information on my onsite wastewater treatment system (OWTS)?**

**A13:** You may find information about your specific parcel by searching our public records at: <http://scceh.com/>

The link to the public records is at the top of the page. You will need to use your Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) to search the records.

**Q14: What should I do with my OWTS after floodwaters have receded or saturated conditions have diminished?**

**A14:** There are several considerations homeowners should be aware of:

- ✓ Do not drink well water until it can be tested. Refer to the **Water Quality** section for information about water quality and testing.
- ✓ Have your system professionally inspected and serviced by a licensed liquid waste hauler. A list of licensed liquid waste haulers can be found on our website at: <http://www.scceh.com/NewHome/Programs/Landuse/QualifiedProfessionals.aspx>
- ✓ Inspect all electrical connections for damage prior to restoring electricity. You may need to hire a Licensed electrician to evaluate the connections. You can look up a contractor's license at the California Department of Consumer Affairs Contractors State License Board web site at: <https://www.cslb.ca.gov/>

Check the area over your septic tank and dispersal area for erosion damage.

**Household Hazardous Waste**

**Q15: I have returned to my house, and I see that a pressurized gas tank has ended up on my property.**

**A15:** Carefully approach the tank. If you smell gas, contact the local fire department and request assistance on what to do. Take any tanks filled with chemicals to your local household hazardous waste site. Look for you're a household hazardous waste site at: [https://dpw.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/Home/RecyclingTrash/HouseholdHazardousWaste\(HHW\).aspx](https://dpw.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/Home/RecyclingTrash/HouseholdHazardousWaste(HHW).aspx)

**Q16: The chemicals in my shop have spilled all over the soil. What can I do?**

**A16:** Contact the Santa Cruz County Environmental Health Division Hazardous Materials program for guidance on what to do. The HazMat Team can be reached at (831) 454-2022 or at: [environmentalhealth@santacruzcounty.us](mailto:environmentalhealth@santacruzcounty.us)

Call 911 if you feel what you are seeing is an immediate risk to health and safety.

## **Mosquito Control**

### **Q17: There is a lot of standing water. Should I be concerned over mosquitoes?**

**A17:** Yes. Rampant mosquito breeding is a risk after a flood. Take measures to address standing water on your property as quickly as possible. Mosquitoes need very little water to breed. Make sure to flip over buckets, kiddie pools and other structures or equipment where water can collect. Contact the Santa Cruz County Mosquito Abatement & Vector Control Division regarding any rampant mosquito and vector issues at (831) 454-2590 or at their web site at:

<https://www.agdept.com/AgriculturalCommissioner/MosquitoAbatementVectorControl.aspx> .

## **Food Safety**

### **Q18: My house did not flood, but I lost power. Is my refrigerated food safe to eat?**

**A18:** Maybe. It all depends for how long the power was gone. Your perishable food is likely safe if the power was gone for a few minutes. The following chart should be used to determine if perishable food is safe:

| <b>Length of Outage</b> | <b>Internal temperature of the perishable food</b> |   |   |                     |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|---------------------|
|                         | <b>Under 41°F</b>                                  | <b>41°F to 45°F</b>                                 | <b>46°F to 50°F</b>                                 | <b>50°F or more</b> |
| <b>0-2 Hours</b>        | <b>OK</b>  | <b>OK</b>   | <b>OK, if cooled to 41°F or less within 2 hours</b> | <b>Unsafe</b>       |
| <b>2-3 Hours</b>        | <b>OK</b>  | <b>OK, if cooled to 41°F or less within 2 hours</b> | <b>OK, if cooled to 41°F or less within 1 hour</b>  | <b>Unsafe</b>       |
| <b>4 or more Hours</b>  | <b>OK</b>  | <b>OK, if cooled to 41°F or less within 1 hour</b>  | <b>Unsafe</b>                                       | <b>Unsafe</b>       |

**If in doubt, or if it smells bad, throw it out!**

### **Q19: What do I do with food that has been exposed to flood water?**

**A19:** While it may appear that some food items are safe for consumption, water can get into certain types of containers we've historically thought of as waterproof. The following food items should be discarded:

- X** Cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes
- X** Home canned foods
- X** Non-waterproof food items
- X** Damaged store-bought cans with sharp dents, bloating, cracks, rusting, punctures, holes, and leaks

Non-waterproof food containers include those with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops, and crimped caps.

- ✓ Waterproof food containers like undamaged, commercially prepared foods in all-metal cans and "retort pouches" (flexible, shelf-stable juice or seafood pouches) can be washed for consumption in the short term. Use the following process to disinfect these containers for use:

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

### **Restaurants and Commercial Food Facilities**

#### **Q20: I received a Boil Water Notice. How should I handle my food service equipment?**

**A20:** If Boil Water Notice is issued, turn off water to vending machines, beverage dispensers, drinking fountains, produce misting systems, coffee makers and ice machines. Use only bottled water or boiled water for handwashing during cleanup.

When Boil Water Notice is lifted, do the following:

- ✓ Flush lines and sanitize all vending machines, beverage dispensers, drinking fountains, produce misting systems, coffee makers and ice machines.
- ✓ Flush all faucets in restrooms, kitchen, waiter stations and drinking fountains.

- ✓ Clean and sanitize all fixtures, sinks, and equipment connected to water supply lines.
- ✓ Clean and sanitize all dishes, utensils, and work areas.

**Q21: Minor flooding occurred in my food facility, and we were able to remediate minor water damage. Some of my equipment was damaged in the process. What should I do?**

**A21:** If only minor equipment damage was experienced, the equipment may be replaced in like. If, however, major equipment damage occurred, you may need to replace the equipment under plan review. To speak to an inspector and discuss your situation call: (831) 454-2022 or email us at: [environmentalhealth@santacruzcounty.com](mailto:environmentalhealth@santacruzcounty.com)

For more information on the plan review process visit our web site at: <https://scceh.com/>

**Q22: My walk-in cooler, refrigerator or ice machine flooded what can I do?**

**A22:** Refrigerators and ice machines have the potential of being contaminated and resulting in respiratory or food contamination. It is best to contact a commercial refrigerator and ice machine maintenance company to inspect, clean and service this equipment. There are a lot of sensitive components that would need decontamination. The equipment may need to be replaced with sanitation and UL rated equipment.

**Q23: My restaurant was severely damaged during the storms. What do I do now?**

**A23:** We are sorry to hear that you experienced such a loss during this storm. Due to the extent of the damage, you will need to go through permitting and plan review with this Agency to re-activate for food service. For more information on the plan review process visit our web site at: <https://scceh.com/>

We will work diligently to respond in a prompt manner for all those involved in this catastrophe.

**Swimming Pools and Spas**

**Q24: My swimming pool or spa was flooded during the storms what should I do?**

**A24:** If your pool or spa overfilled with rainwater, and your pool equipment room remained dry, you can simply drain some of the water (discard the water through a sewer line or as approved by the local public works department), clean your skimmer baskets, vacuum, shock the pool and rebalance water chemistry.

If however, your pool or spa was flooded by flood water, you should contact a C61/D35 licensed swimming pool and spa maintenance contractor to evaluate and repair your swimming pool or spa.

If significant equipment damage occurred and you will need to conduct pool surface repair work, you should contact a C53 swimming pool contractor to conduct your work.

We encourage you seek the services of a properly licensed pool contractor. For more information on hiring a contractor and distinguishing characteristics for the different contractor licenses, visit the California Department of Consumer Affairs Contractors State License Board at: <https://www.cslb.ca.gov/> .

### **Commercial Swimming Pool and Spa Operators**

#### **Q25: My swimming pool or spa was flooded during the storms what should I do?**

**A25:** If your pool or spa overfilled with rainwater, and your pool equipment room remained dry, you can simply drain some of the water (discard the water through a sewer line or as approved by the local public works department), clean your skimmer baskets, vacuum, shock the pool and rebalance water chemistry.

If, however, your pool or spa was flooded by flood water, you must contact a C61/D35 licensed swimming pool and spa maintenance contractor to evaluate and repair your swimming pool or spa. Pump, filter, chemical dispensing, and heating equipment must be replaced under plan review with this Agency unless you are replacing with the same make and model components. Please visit our web site for more information regarding our plan review process at: <https://scceh.com/>

If significant equipment damage occurred and you will need to conduct pool surface repair work, you must contact a C53 swimming pool contractor to conduct your work.

We encourage you seek the services of a properly licensed pool contractor. For more information on hiring a contractor and distinguishing characteristics for the different contractor licenses, visit the California Department of Consumer Affairs Contractors State License Board at: <https://www.cslb.ca.gov/>