

# Consumer Product Safety Commission Alert

From the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, D.C. 20207

## Safety Tips for Flood Victims

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recommends several safety tips to the victims of floods. This safety alert illustrates some dangerous practices which consumers may be tempted to engage in during efforts to rebuild or while staying in temporary housing, tents, or partially damaged homes. This information is provided in an effort to prevent injuries and deaths from consumer products as flood survivors make new beginnings. "We hope this information helps prevent product-related injuries and deaths during these difficult times."

- *Chairman Ann Brown*

Do not use electrical appliances that have been wet. Water can damage the motors in electrical appliances, such as furnaces, freezers, refrigerators, washing machines, and dryers.

If electrical appliances have been under water, have them dried out and reconditioned by a qualified service repairman. Do not turn on damaged electrical appliances because the electrical parts can become grounded and pose an electric shock hazard or overheat and cause a fire. Before flipping a switch or plugging in an appliance, have an electrician check the house wiring and appliance to make sure it is safe to use.

## Electricity and water don't mix.

Use a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) to help prevent electrocutions and electrical shock injuries. Portable GFCIs require no tools to install and are available at prices ranging from \$12 to \$30.

**When using a "wet-dry vacuum cleaner," be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions to avoid electric shock.**

Do not allow the power cord connections to become wet. Do not remove or bypass the ground pin on the three-prong plug. Use a GFCI to prevent electrocution.

**NEVER** remove or bypass the ground pin on a three-pronged plug in order to insert it into a non-grounded outlet.

**NEVER** allow the connection between the machine's power cord and the extension cord to lie in water.

**To prevent a gas explosion and fire, have gas appliances (natural gas and LP gas) inspected and cleaned after flooding.**

If gas appliances have been under water, have them inspected and cleaned and their gas controls replaced. The gas company or a qualified appliance repair person or plumber should do this work. Water can damage gas controls so that safety features are blocked, even if the gas controls appear to operate properly. If you suspect a gas leak, don't light a match, use any electrical appliance, turn lights on or off, or use the phone. These may produce sparks. Sniff for gas leaks, starting at the water heater. If you smell gas or hear gas escaping, turn off the main valve, open windows, leave the area immediately, and call the gas company or a qualified appliance repair person or plumber for repairs. Never store flammable materials near any gas appliance or equipment.

Check to make sure your smoke detector is functioning.

Smoke detectors can save your life in a fire. Check the battery frequently to make sure it is operating. Fire extinguishers also are a good idea.

Gasoline is made to explode!

Never use gasoline around ignition sources such as cigarettes, matches, lighters, water heaters, or electric sparks. Gasoline vapors can travel and be ignited by pilot light or other ignition sources. Make sure that gasoline powered generators are away from easily combustible materials.

Chain saws can cause serious injuries

Chain saws can be hazardous, especially if they "kick back." To help reduce this hazard, make sure that your chain saw is equipped with the low-kickback chain. Look for other safety features on chain saws, including hand guard, safety tip, chain brake, vibration reduction system, spark arrestor on gasoline models, trigger or throttle lockout, chain catcher, and bumper spikes. Always wear shoes, gloves, and protective glasses. On new saws, look for certification to the ANSI B-175.1 standard.

When cleaning up from a flood, store medicines and chemicals away from young children. Poisonings can happen when young children swallow medicines and household chemicals.

Keep household chemicals and medicines locked up away from children. Use the child resistant closures that come on most medicines and chemicals.

Burning charcoal gives off carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide has no odor and can kill you. Never burn charcoal inside homes, tents, campers, vans, cars, trucks, garages, or mobile homes.

**WARNING:** Submerged gas control valves, circuit breakers, and fuses pose explosion and fire hazard!

Replace all gas control valves, circuit breakers, and fuses that have been under water:

**GAS CONTROL VALVES** on furnaces, water heaters, and other gas appliances that have been under water are unfit for continued use. If they are used, they could cause a fire or an explosion. Silt and corrosion from flood water can damage internal components of control valves and prevent proper operation. Gas can leak and result in an explosion or fire. Replace ALL gas control valves that have been under water.

ELECTRIC CIRCUIT BREAKERS AND FUSES can malfunction when water and silt get inside. Discard ALL circuit breakers and fuses that have been submerged.

For "disaster-related" questions, call the FEMA Helpline at 800-525-0321.

For people who live in counties already declared eligible for "federal disaster assistance," call FEMA on 800-462-9029.

Consumers can obtain this publication and additional publication information from the [Publications section](#) of CPSC's web site or by sending your publication request to [info@cpsc.gov](mailto:info@cpsc.gov).

This document is in the public domain. It may be reproduced without change in part or whole by an individual or organization without permission. If it is reproduced, however, the Commission would appreciate knowing how it is used. Write the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Office of Information and Public Affairs, 4330 East West Highway, Bethesda, MD 20814 or send an e-mail via CPSC's [On-Line Form](#).

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is charged with protecting the public from unreasonable risks of serious injury or death from thousands of types of consumer products under the agency's jurisdiction. The CPSC is committed to protecting consumers and families from products that pose a fire, electrical, chemical, or mechanical hazard. The CPSC's work to ensure the safety of consumer products - such as toys, cribs, power tools, cigarette lighters, and household chemicals - contributed significantly to the decline in the rate of deaths and injuries associated with consumer products over the past 30 years.

To report a dangerous product or a product-related injury, call CPSC's hotline at (800) 638-2772 or CPSC's teletypewriter at (301) 595-7054, or visit CPSC's web site at [www.cpsc.gov/talk.html](http://www.cpsc.gov/talk.html). To join a CPSC email subscription list, please go to <https://www.cpsc.gov/cpsclist.aspx>. Consumers can obtain this release and recall information at CPSC's Web site at [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov).