

MID-MICHIGAN

State police offer after-flood safety guidelines

With river levels above flood stage in Isabella County, the State Emergency Operations Center reminds residents to stay safe and healthy both during and after a flood by following some easy steps.

"Restaurants and other food-based businesses should be following their emergency action plans to help protect the safety of their employees, customers and businesses," said Jamie Clover Adams, director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. "MDARD's food inspectors are in those counties working with local health departments to ensure all potentially-contaminated food is discarded and properly disposed of."

"By working together, we can ensure the safety of the food supply in the flood zones."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, MDARD, and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality offer the following recommendations to stay safe after a flood:

- Identify and throw away food that may not be safe to eat.

Throw away food that may have come in contact with flood or storm water including any canned foods that are bulging, opened or damaged.

Throw away food with an unusual odor, color, or texture.

Throw away perishable foods (including meat, poultry, fish, eggs and leftovers) that have been above 40 degrees for two hours or more. Thawed food containing ice crystals or is 40 degrees or below can be refrozen or cooked.

If cans have come in contact with floodwater or storm water, remove the labels, wash the cans and dip

them in a solution of one cup of bleach in five gallons of water. Re-label the cans with a marker.

- Store food safely. While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. Add block ice or dry ice to your refrigerator if the electricity is expected to be off longer than four hours. Wear heavy gloves when handling ice.

To prevent illness from water:

- Listen to, and follow, public announcements. Local authorities will tell you if public water is safe to drink or to use for cooking or bathing. If the water is not safe to use, follow local instructions to use bottled water or to boil or disinfect water for cooking, cleaning, or bathing.

- Consider well water safety. If flooding occurs around your water well, your drinking water may become contaminated. When flood waters rise over the top of the well, contaminants can enter through the well cap or vent and increase the risk of illness.

Flood water contains bacteria and viruses from soil, organic debris and sewage systems, along with fertilizers, pesticides and other chemical contaminants. Shallow wells and old, poorly-constructed wells are vulnerable to water quality changes when muddy flood waters deposit contaminants close to the well. Older wells located in below-grade pits are vulnerable to contamination from flooding, even if flooding at the ground surface did not occur. Well pits are unsanitary and are prone to flooding after heavy spring rains or rapid snowmelt occur and surface water or the water level within the surrounding soil gathers within the pit.

Anyone with a flooded well should immediately refrain from drinking the water and take the following steps:

- Once the flooding recedes, begin flushing the water system. Hook a hose up to an outside faucet or a faucet near the water storage tank and flush the water for at least two hours after the water clears up. If a large volume of water entered the well, several hours of pumping may be needed. Once the water is clear at the storage tank, flush the home distribution piping.

- Contact a state of Michigan-registered water well drilling contractor and request that your water system be disinfected.

- After flushing the chlorine from the system, collect a water sample and submit it to a certified laboratory for coliform bacteria analysis.

- Contact your local health department for further assistance if needed.

To prevent and treat other illness and injury:

- Prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas produced by many types of equipment and is poisonous to breathe. Don't use a generator, pressure washer, charcoal grill, camp stove or other gasoline- or char-

coal-burning device inside homes, basements or garages, or near a window, door or vent. Don't run a car or truck inside a garage attached to a house, even if the door is left open.

Don't heat homes with gas ovens. If a carbon monoxide detector sounds, leave home immediately and call 911.

Seek prompt medical attention if you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning and are feeling dizzy, lightheaded or nauseated.

- Beware of electrical and fire hazards. Never touch a fallen power line. Call the utility company to report fallen power lines. Avoid contact with overhead power lines during cleanup and other activities. If electrical circuits and equipment have gotten wet or are in or near water, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel. Do not turn the power back on until electrical equipment has been inspected by a qualified electrician. Do not burn candles near flammable items or leave the candle unattended. If possible, use flashlights or other battery-operated lights instead of candles.

- Treat wounds. Clean out all open wounds and cuts with soap and clean water. Apply an antibiotic ointment. Contact a doctor to find out whether more treatment is needed (such as a tetanus shot). If a wound gets red, swells or drains, seek immediate medical attention.

- Wash your hands. Use soap and water to wash your hands. If water isn't available, you can use alcohol-based products made for washing hands.

- Wear protective gear for cleanup work. Wear hard hats, goggles, heavy work gloves and water-tight boots with steel toes and insoles (not just steel shank). Wear earplugs or protective headphones to reduce risk from equipment noise.

To treat and prevent pet illness and injuries:

- Be aware that a pet's behavior may change before, during and even after a disaster. Familiar scents and landmarks may be altered and your pet may become confused and lost. In the first few days after the disaster, leash your pets when they go outside. Always maintain close contact. Reintroduce food in small servings, gradually working up to full portions, especially if animals have been without food for a prolonged period of time.

- Pets can be poisoned by exposure to harmful chemicals, products or foods. If you suspect that your pet has been poisoned, call the Animal Poison Control Center toll-free 888-426-4435.

— From the Michigan State Police

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Morning Sun

Volume 40, Issue 114

311E Superior Street
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Phone: 989-779-6000
themorningsun.com

CONTACT US

Circulation: 989-8942
Fax: 989-779-6961
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Subscription rates: By Carrier

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\$4.00 - Saturday and Sunday

Newsstand price is \$1 Monday-Saturday,

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