

RISK GUIDE TO WORKING ON FLOOD DAMAGED PROPERTY

This guide should be used by construction tradespeople when planning and undertaking remediation work on flood damaged property after the flood has receded. It is not an exhaustive list of risks that may be encountered but is intended as a guide to typical issues and risks that should be considered by persons supervising and carrying out the work.

Risk

Response



Has the building or property been identified as potentially unstable by a Rapid Building Assessor? If it has been issued with a red or yellow building placard – notify the issuer before accessing the property. If there is visual evidence of structural damage, then proceed carefully until a suitably qualified person has been able to assess the property and advise on making it safe to work in and around.

Structural Instability



Biological Contamination

Treat all water as sewage contaminated. Any sign of gastric illness should be followed up with medical assessment. Practice strict hygiene practices including washing of hands. When dealing with standing water, workers should wear gloves, waterproof boots and other PPE necessary to avoid contact with skin, mouth eyes etc. When cleaning contaminated surfaces (floors and walls) wear protective clothing to avoid contact. Dispose of all cleaning materials using sealed bags and or containers. When working indoors visually check for the presence of black mold and if suspected use a testing kit or contact suitably qualified persons for mold treatment. Use appropriate PPE including a respirator if working in a known contaminated area. Ensure worker vaccinations are up to date, especially for hepatitis A.



Asbestos

The risk of asbestos contamination is higher in older buildings (pre 2000) and increased when wall linings have been removed and the building has been dried out. Refer specific practice notes here. Any remedial work that is undertaken should be visually evaluated for asbestos contamination and if suspected then tested. If contamination is confirmed, then a licensed asbestos removal person will be required to assist before any other work can continue.



Electricity

Flood water may still be present in some areas. This may still be in contact with electrical fittings, and appliances presenting a potential danger. Older homes may lack higher safety standards such as RCD protection, and should be treated with extra diligence. Effected areas, fittings, or appliances should be treated as unsafe. Do not enter these areas or touch equipment until advised otherwise by a licensed electrician. If it is safe to do so power to these areas should be switched off. Use battery hand tools where possible, and use an inline RCD whilst using any mains powered tools, or appliances. For more detailed advice for assessing flood damaged electrical systems visit: https://www.masterelectricians.org.nz/menews/flood_advice/



Gas

Ensure appliances that have water damage have been thoroughly tested to ensure they are working correctly. Any structural damage in the building could have compromised gas fittings and main connections.



Stress

Workers in our industry are often exposed to risk factors that increase stress. Flood remediation work can further increase stress as our workforce can be around people living in damaged homes, tight timeliness, workers impacted by their own flood situations and many others. Crisis Resource - Mates in Construction NZ is there to support the construction community through challenging times. If you or someone you know in the industry is struggling or needs help, call 0800 111 315.