

Floods and storms

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Workplace health and safety laws when cleaning after floods and storms

Employers and workers involved in the flood and storm recovery efforts must still remember their obligations under Queensland's health and safety laws.

These laws are in place to protect Queenslanders. By being vigilant and maintaining safety during this difficult time, you can help reduce the risk of death, injury and illness to yourself, your workers and others involved in the clean up and repair effort.

Audio messages

Cyclone and flood community service announcements (CSA)

Asbestos CSA (1 min 46 sec)
(MP3 File, 832.6 KB)

Hazardous chemicals CSA (1 min 44 sec)
(MP3 File, 815.0 KB)

Hazardous Chemicals CSA
(55 sec) (MP3 File, 440.1 KB)

Video

The importance of effective safety management systems in natural disasters



Health and safety management system case study film - ENERGETICS

Steps for planning to do work safely

Check that an electricity clearance has been given before attempting to use it.

Identify any likely asbestos containing materials or dangerous chemicals.

Assess what work needs to be done.

Work out the order of the work to be done so that new risks are not introduced, e.g. think about how you will get access to the areas where the work is to be done, or the possibility of creating instability from removing things in the wrong order.

Consider what could go wrong during the clean up and repair work.

Work out what tools and equipment will be needed to do the work safely.

Check the correct equipment is available and is in good working order.

Check that the people required to operate the equipment have the right skills and competencies and ensure supervision of less skilled workers is available.

Check that people allocated to perform work are not fatigued.

Make sure that workers have the correct personal protective equipment (for example rubber-soled shoes, gloves, hats, sun protective clothing and high visibility vests) and it is worn correctly.

Check that appropriate first aid, clean drinking water and hand hygiene measures are available and there is access to medical treatment in the event of an injury occurring.

Check that there is access to toilet facilities.

Highlight any counselling services available to staff and encourage their use.

Working at a height

- Install handrails if necessary, such as when working on a roof or from a platform above the ground where people are carrying out

Flood information and advice

Asbestos: a home renovator's and tradesperson's guide for minor work in domestic buildings
(PDF, 1.6 MB)

Asbestos - cleaning and/or removing asbestos containing materials
(PDF, 157 kB)

Dangerous or hazardous goods - cleaning and/or disposing of dangerous goods and chemicals
(PDF, 149 kB)

Cleaning asbestos cement roofs
(PDF, 324 kB)

Common locations of materials containing asbestos in a house
(PDF, 304 kB)

Quad bikes on farms - A handbook for workplaces
(PDF, 2 MB)

Queensland floods and managing fatigue
(PDF, 107 kB)

Rural fact sheet - tractors
(PDF, 58 kB)

work that could cause them to fall, or the fall itself could cause a serious injury.

- When using a ladder:
 - make sure the ladder is sufficiently sturdy
 - use the ladder for the purpose it was designed for
 - try to secure ladders before use
 - do not use a ladder on soggy/soft ground.
- Ensure surfaces are stable and access to areas with unstable floors is safe.
- Be aware of anyone working below and the potential for things to fall on them.

Find more information about [working at a height](#).

Demolition

Check that your demolition work doesn't require a licensed demolisher. Call Workplace Health and Safety on 1300 369 915 for more information. If it does require a licence, ensure a person with the right licence is engaged.

If the work doesn't require a licensed demolisher, make sure the work is undertaken by people who understand the structure, or the part of the structure, they are demolishing.

Check the location of any underground, overhead or concealed services (e.g. gas, water, electricity) prior to commencing any demolition work.

Asbestos - removal of, and work on asbestos containing materials

- Buildings built before 1990 may contain asbestos materials. Removal of 10m² or more of asbestos containing material must be done by a licensed asbestos removalist. You can download a poster [Where to look for asbestos](#) which shows the potential location of asbestos materials in a house.
- Avoid removing asbestos materials unless absolutely necessary, e.g. only remove asbestos sheeting that is already broken and dislodged.
- Avoid breaking asbestos material.

Downloads

Slips, trips and falls prevention
(PDF, 702 kB)

Other advice

Electrical safety during flood clean up

Electrical safety information and advice

Repair and reinstatement work - electrical licensing

Legal services

Free legal information for flood victims

Free replacement of your flood damaged birth and marriage certificates

Deferral of unpaid SPER fines for flood victims

Queensland Government flood advice

Queensland Government flood advice and support

- Do not use power tools or any abrasive materials on asbestos containing surfaces.
- Avoid using high pressure water to clean the surface of asbestos materials:
 - care must be exercised when cleaning the surface of asbestos materials so as to avoid damage and the release of asbestos fibres
 - roofs containing asbestos materials must NOT be cleaned using high pressure water cleaners or water blasters
 - other surfaces containing asbestos materials such as walls should be cleaned using water hoses or by hand. Painted asbestos containing materials are less likely to release fibres and can be cleaned with slightly higher water pressure
 - regularly check the surface of the material you are cleaning to ensure it is not being damaged
 - more information is available on [Cleaning asbestos cement roofs](#).
- Avoid walking on corrugated asbestos roofs as they may collapse from the weight.
- Avoid using power tools to drill or cut asbestos materials.
- Make sure asbestos materials are wet during removal and other work; isolate electricity to wet areas.
- Wear disposable coveralls with a hood as well as an approved particulate respirator (Class P2 – this will be marked on the packaging) when removing asbestos.
- Thoroughly wash hands, shower and wash hair after handling or after suspecting you may have handled asbestos materials.
- Double bag/wrap all asbestos materials and waste and call your local authority to find out where to properly dispose of any asbestos products.
- Safe work procedures including for low speed drill/hand drilling and hand sawing asbestos containing material, and the removal of less than 10m² of asbestos containing material, including wrapping waste and clean-up after the work is completed, can be found in

[Asbestos: a home renovator's and tradesperson's guide for minor work in domestic premises](#) guide (PDF, 1.6 MB).

Download the fact sheet on [Asbestos - cleaning and/or removing asbestos containing materials](#) (PDF, 157 kB)

Chemical hazards

Floods and storms may have buried, moved or damaged hazardous chemical containers including corrosives, oils, pesticides and industrial chemicals. To safely handle and dispose of hazardous chemicals, the following should be considered:

- Try to identify chemicals and their hazards using labels and markings. If water has removed the label, seek expert advice and chemical identification from a waste management consultant.
- If a container may cause potential risk, (e.g. bulging under pressure, leaking, or in a precarious position), isolate the immediate area and call '000'. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is equipped and trained to deal with these situations.
- Wear personal protective equipment such as chemical resistant gloves, protective eyewear, closed footwear and long sleeved shirts and pants to minimise exposure to skin.
- Isolate chemicals from general waste.
- Segregate chemicals based on the condition of the container (damaged or undamaged) and based on reactions with one another, for example oils and dry pool chlorine may cause a fire.
- In Brisbane, contact the city council on 3403 8888 to arrange collection of hazardous waste. For more information see Brisbane City Council's [flood fact sheet](#). Areas outside the Brisbane region should contact their local authority for advice on disposal of the waste.
- Take precautions to protect the area from further damage during the clean up, such as preventing mobile plant (e.g. earth-moving equipment) coming into contact with containers, particularly gas cylinders.
- Monitor atmospheres in enclosed spaces using a suitable air monitoring device (e.g. gas detector) where plant and equipment exhaust is generated. Ensure exhaust gases are ventilated to prevent the build up of contaminant exhaust gases such as carbon monoxide. Reduce this risk by operating generators and other fuel-

powered equipment outdoors wherever possible. For example, pumps used for water removal from a basement.

- Chemical processing and handling equipment that has been flood or storm affected should be checked prior to operation, ensuring electrical installations are checked by a qualified electrician.
- For gas supply systems e.g. town gas or fixed tank installations contact your supplier regarding the safe return to operation.
- Ensure the appropriate decontamination of clothing and equipment after handling or coming in contact with chemicals. Wash down clothing with water and launder separately.

Download the fact sheet on [Dangerous or hazardous goods - cleaning and/or disposing of dangerous goods and chemicals](#) (PDF, 149 kB).

Slips, trips and falls

- Keep work areas as clear and dry as possible.
- Wear suitable footwear with good grip.
- Try to avoid climbing on objects or surfaces; use equipment such as ladders or step stools wherever possible and safe.
- Try to make sure there is adequate light in work areas.

Download the [Guide for preventing slips trips and falls](#) (PDF, 702 kB) and view other information on [slips, trips and falls](#).

Biological hazards

- Maintain good hand and personal hygiene. Wash your hands well after contact with mud, flood water and contaminated items and equipment, and before eating and drinking.
- Clean and cover cuts and wounds. Talk to your doctor if you get a wound as you may need a tetanus booster.
- Where contact with flood water and mud is unavoidable, wear enclosed footwear, gloves and suitable clothing.
- Take precautions to avoid mosquito bites.

Environmental conditions after floods and storms increase the risk for infectious diseases. Skin infections, diarrhoeal disease, respiratory infections and mosquito-borne diseases are the most common infectious diseases after floods and storms in Queensland.

Less commonly, contact with floodwater can cause serious illness such as leptospirosis and melioidosis. See your doctor if you become sick after contact with floodwater or if you need a tetanus booster.

More information about disaster management and sources of disease is available from [Queensland Health](#).

Fatigue management

- Roster shifts so that workers/volunteers have the opportunity to sleep continuously for 7 to 8 hours in each 24 hour period.
- Rotate shifts forward rather than back.
- Limit number of consecutive night shifts to four.
- Finish night shifts by eight am.
- Allow a minimum of 12 hours between consecutive shifts.
- Roster at least two full nights sleep after the last night shift.
- Provide frequent rest breaks during shifts.
- Provide transport where possible to minimise the risks associated with commuting.
- Provide an area/room for workers/volunteers to sleep before commuting home.
- Schedule safety critical and complex tasks during the daytime (when workers/volunteers are most alert).

Download the fact sheet on [Managing fatigue](#) (PDF, 107 kB) and view other information about [fatigue](#).

Psychological stress

The emotional impacts of these natural disasters on workers may not come to the surface for a little while. To minimise the risk of psychological stress on workers employers should:

- Highlight counselling services available to workers and encourage them to use them.
- Consult with workers when setting realistic work targets and priorities for completion of clean up and repair works.

- Consult with workers about any changes to their roles, work tasks and broader business changes, and where possible allow their input in decision making.
- Hold regular worker/team discussions on additional pressures/challenges.
- Provide 'time out' areas for workers to distance themselves and take breaks from demanding work tasks.
- Recognise and reward workers for their efforts.

Manual tasks

- Use mechanical aids like wheel barrows, trolleys, earth-moving equipment.
- Use long handled equipment such as shovels and brooms.
- Provide adequate numbers of people to do the work.
- Ensure people have adequate rest breaks.
- Place rubbish skips close to where the work is being done.
- Where team lifting is the last resort, ensure adequate numbers of people are provided, there is good communication about what is required and a leader is appointed.
- Ensure equipment is in good working order.
- Consider the physical capacity of your workers and assign their work appropriately.

Displaced fauna

- Check in and under objects before attempting to move an object as snakes, spiders and other undomesticated animals may be taking refuge in the dry location. Startling these animals may cause them to become aggressive and attack.
- Do not attempt to kill snakes as most snake bite incidents occur when someone has attempted to strike and kill the snake.
- Engage a wildlife removal specialist to remove snakes from buildings.

Quad bike use

- Wear an appropriate helmet.

- Identify and assess potential hazards prior to attempting to cross any waterways, flooded or muddy terrain and be aware of washouts.
- Operate quad bike at a safe speed suitable to the conditions.
- Do not allow children or untrained, inexperienced people to operate quad bikes.
- Be aware of hidden obstacles that may be covered by mud, debris, grass or water.

Download the fact sheet on [Quad bikes on farms](#) (PDF, 2 MB) and view other information about [quad bikes](#).

Operating wheeled or tracked machinery in the wet

- Be aware of changed ground conditions which may increase the risk of roll over, bogging or loss of stability.
- Take account of decreased vision due to rain, mud and other conditions.
- Be aware of possible an unstable waterway, channel or dam.

Download the fact sheet on [Tractors](#) (PDF, 255 kB) and view other information about [tractors](#).

Contact us

For more information about other workplace health and safety issues, call Workplace Health and Safety Infoline on 1300 369 915.

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