

Proper Cleanup Following Hurricanes Can Reduce Mold and Minimize Health Risks

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ST. CROIX, Virgin Islands – U.S. Virgin Islanders could encounter dangerous mold while cleaning up their homes after hurricanes Irma and Maria. Survivors can successfully remove mold and protect themselves and their families by taking a few basic precautions.

You should assume you have mold growth if your home was flooded during one or both of the storms and you were unable to dry it out within 48 hours, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other disaster response officials. The same goes for furniture and other household items that may have been soaked by floodwaters or heavy rain. Stagnant water and wet materials are ideal breeding grounds for mold.

In such cases, you should completely dry everything, clean up the mold, and make certain the moisture problem is eradicated.

People with breathing problems, like asthma, or who have weakened immune systems should stay away from moldy sites. Children should not take part in disaster cleanup work.

The basic rule is, if you can see or smell mold, take steps to eliminate the excess moisture. Proceed with cleanup using the following tips:

1. Put on personal protective equipment: an N-95 respirator at a minimum, boots, goggles and rubber gloves.
2. Remove standing water and wet materials. Use a wet vacuum to remove water from floors, carpets, and hard surfaces. Dry your home and everything in it as quickly as you can.
3. Open all doors and windows when you are working and leave as many open as is safe when you leave.



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Page 1 of 3

- Open inside doors, especially closets and interior rooms, to let air flow to all areas. Take doors off their hinges if you need to.
 - Open kitchen cabinets and bathroom vanity doors; remove drawers, wipe them clean, and stack them to dry.
 - Open the attic access to let air flow to the attic. Before you open the attic door, make sure nothing will fall on you.
4. When electricity is safe to use, use fans and dehumidifiers to remove moisture. Do not use fans if mold has already started to grow, because the fans may spread the mold.
 5. Clean with water and a detergent. Remove all mold you can see. Dry right away.
 6. If you use cleaning products, do not mix cleaning products together. DO NOT mix bleach and ammonia because it can create toxic vapors. If using bleach use no more than 1 cup of household bleach per gallon of water.
 7. Painting or caulking over mold will not prevent mold from growing. Fix the water problem completely and clean up all the mold before you paint or caulk.
 8. Throw away items that can't be cleaned and dried. Throw away anything that was wet with flood water and can't be cleaned and dried completely within 24 to 48 hours. If you have precious items that you want to preserve, follow these guidelines from the Smithsonian Institute:
www.si.edu/mci/english/learn_more/taking_care/mnm.html .

Ensure mold cleanup is complete before reoccupying your home. For more information on mold and cleanup, see FEMA's printable brochure *How to Prevent Mold after a Flood* at www.fema.gov/library/prepandprev.shtm and the *Homeowner's and Renter's Guide to Mold Cleanup After Disasters* at: http://wcms-wp.cdc.gov/mold/pdfs/Homeowners_and_Renters_Guide.pdf.

The CDC website includes information regarding mold health hazards as well as prevention, clean up and remediation guidance:
<https://www.cdc.gov/mold/cleanup.htm>.

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Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-



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Page 2 of 3

621-3362 (voice, **711/VRS** - Video Relay Service) (TTY: **800-462-7585**).
Multilingual operators are available (press 2 for Spanish).

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

For official information on the recovery effort following the hurricanes, please visit www.fema.gov/disaster/4335, www.fema.gov/disaster/4340, www.informusvi.com or www.usviupdate.com. Follow us on twitter @femaregion2.

*To donate or volunteer, contact the voluntary or charitable organization of your choice through the National Voluntary Agencies Active in Disasters (NVOAD) at www.nvoad.org. For those who wish to help, **cash** donations offer voluntary agencies the most flexibility in obtaining the most-needed resources and pumps money into the local economy to help businesses recover. The Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands also has the "Fund for the Virgin Islands" at www.USVIrecovery.org.*



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Page 3 of 3