



# INFORMATION SHEET

## SOME GUIDANCE ON THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN RETURNING TO FLOOD AFFECTED AREAS

RefNo: NAT GEN H1-02

The recent flooding across Queensland and NSW has caused immense damage to properties and lives. In coming days and weeks, the Queensland Government is likely to produce information for all residents on how they would prefer people 'return home' and begin to deal with the damage to individual homes and business.

***The Queensland Government has advised that no one should re-enter a home without having a licensed electrician confirm the property is safe to enter.***

People with insurance should also check first with your insurance provider before entering the property and making any changes.

In the interim, the Housing Industry Association (HIA) has prepared some basic information to assist anyone returning to a home to think carefully about what they should **and should not** do.

Water damage to homes from the inundation is only one of the many problems that will need to be managed over time. Some of the other concerns that people should consider include:

- Health issues
  - pollution from sewage and mud
  - stagnant water, insects and dead animals
  - removal of materials such as asbestos, without adequate protection
  - availability of drinking and washing water
- Safety issues
  - services not being switched off or disconnected
  - photo voltaic cells continuing to generate electricity in daylight hours
  - snakes and vermin
  - slips, trips, falls including holes hidden by silt and debris
  - contamination in the immediate area from chemicals stored in the home
  - vehicles left in a perilous position
  - broken glass and sharp objects
  - unstable structures
- Damage to buildings and structures
  - from the force of the water or
  - objects or debris carried by the water
- The possibility of collapse of weakened structures from
  - Waterlogged materials
  - Undermined footings
  - Subsidence of the land
  - Impact damage to the building

### **So what should you consider if you are returning to clean up a home that has been flooded?**

Before returning to the inside of any home or other building, you should first try to establish some order outside the building. The following steps provide a starting point, but are by no means a definitive list of things to consider or do. Most importantly be prepared by making sure you take essential equipment to protect yourself and remain alert to any changes to the environment.

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**DISCLAIMER - The above is intended to provide general information in summary form. The contents do not constitute specific advice and should not be relied upon as such. Formal specific advice should be sought by members with respect to particular matters before taking action.**

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### ***Equipment checklist***

- Keep a battery-powered radio with you so you can listen for situation updates and news.
- Have a battery-powered torch to inspect damaged buildings.
- Carry a mobile phone to maintain contact.
- A camera and/or video camera
- Use personal protective clothing such as non-slip gum boots, gloves, goggles, head protection and respirators and insulated tools as is appropriate for the individual situation/task at hand.
- Take sufficient drinking water for drinking and washing and food for consumption whilst on site and cleaning materials for personal hygiene.
- Insect repellent
- Cleaning materials and products for clean up and personal hygiene.
- Have a stocked first aid kit at hand.

### ***Entering the property***

1. Check with emergency services that it is safe to return to the area where the home is located.
2. Notify someone that you are returning home and of the time you expect to be there and are planning to return if unable to stay.
3. Be vigilant of snakes, vermin and buried/submerged debris that can cause injury.
4. Be aware that there may be areas on the property which appear to be solid ground but are holes filled with silt and debris. These may not appear for many weeks after the water has receded.

### ***Before you enter the home***

5. Check that all electrical, gas and water services (if there are broken water pipes) are switched off or disconnected.
  - a. pay particular attention to photo voltaic cells for power or hot water systems, because even when the electrical networks are off, these PV arrays will still generate electricity during daylight hours at 230V+ DC, making them potentially lethal. Danger areas are the switchboard board and particularly the inverter.
  - b. check for the presence of leaking gas as a result of a broken or damages domestic gas line, gas can accumulate and remain after the service has been disconnected. If gas is present, after services have been disconnected, allow time for the dispersal of the gas and avoid using naked flames in the immediate area.
6. Make a record of the property before, during and after clean up - Photograph, video or record the condition of the site and buildings noting both damage and debris before undertaking any repairs or restoration.
7. Inspect the building for structural damage and take note of any obvious areas that should not to be entered when inside.
8. Pump, siphon, sweep or remove water from low lying areas, basements and garages located beneath the main buildings, grass areas and paths, then shovel or sweep hard surfaces until relatively clean.
  - a. Mud can be contaminated by effluent or raw sewerage and if it isn't removed it can prove to be a health hazard as well as leaving a lingering odour.
  - b. Scatter hydrated lime over raw ground or grass areas to eliminate the risk or infection from bacteria.
9. Establish an area that can be easily accessed from outside the property boundary to store/dump rubbish and debris both now and during future clean up operations.

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### ***Entering the home***

Once you have confirmed that it is safe to enter the home, the damage will vary based on the level that the water reached within the building.

You must always be mindful that entering a damaged building is a risk and your movement in the building and anything you move or remove from the home may cause something that at first appeared safe to become unsafe.

Key areas that should be checked and where necessary removed from the home include:

#### *Foundations*

- Check there has been no undermining or movement
- Termite protection systems may need to be re-installed

#### *Floors*

- Remove any carpets, loose vinyl or other unattached damaged floor coverings
- Some weeks or even months may be required for materials to thoroughly dry out and a moisture meter may be required to establish the moisture content
- Premature installation of floor coverings can lead to mould development if not fully dry

#### *Walls*

- Check for alignment and structural integrity plus cracks or loose render on masonry walls
- With cavity walls internal wall linings may need to be removed to flush out mud which if left can have an enduring odour

#### *Doors, Skirtings, Architraves and Cupboards*

- Often these components need replacement due to water damage which will have caused swelling, shrinking (when dried out), cracking and warping
- Door, cupboard and cabinet hardware may need replacement if mud has affected the mechanism

#### *Ceilings*

- Check the top surface for mud or sodden insulation and discard
- The effect of water damage will determine if the ceiling is able to be kept or replaced

#### *Roof*

- Check tiles or metal roofing for damage and replace components as required
- Check roofing structural members, rafters/trusses, for damage and replace as required
- Check gutters, downpipes, flashings for damage and replace as necessary

#### *Services*

- All gas, electrical and plumbing systems should be checked by the relevant licensed trades person and only turned on once this has taken place

#### *Asbestos*

- It is illegal to remove any asbestos material without a license, irrespective of the circumstances

**HIA members across Australia are in the process of offering their assistance to residents in flood affected areas. This help will be coordinated through the Queensland Building Services Authority and HIA's offices in Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Townsville and Coffs Harbour. HIA will provide more details of how to access this support through our webpage from time to time.**

#### **Use this Information Carefully**

This information is intended to be used only as a general guide, to be applied intelligently and cautiously having regard to the actual circumstances. HIA has no specific knowledge of your property and its particular features, and can accept no liability for any injury, loss or damage you or any other person may suffer as a result of using the information provided in this guide. If in doubt consult a professional builder or relevant licensed tradesperson.

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