

Hurricane/Tornado Recovery Efforts and Clean-Up Hazards FactSheet

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Hurricanes and tornados can cause a lot of damage and destruction, creating many hazards for employees responsible for recovery and cleanup. Many employees such as utility workers, law enforcement personnel, firefighters, emergency medical personnel, and military personnel who are required to provide assistance during a natural disaster may also be required to help with recovery and cleanup. Contractors may be employed to help with efforts. In addition, employees may be required to assist with recovery and cleanup at their worksite. All employees must beware of the many hazards that can cause injuries or illnesses after a storm.

Employers and employees should take preventive measures to ensure safety during recovery and cleanup efforts after a hurricane or tornado.

- Inspect the worksite before allowing employees to enter. Evaluate building structures, roadways, surfaces, trenches and excavations for damage, stability and safety.
- Establish a plan for contacting emergency personnel in the event of an emergency.
- Report hazards such as downed power lines, frayed electric wires, gas leaks, or snakes to the appropriate authorities.
- Take frequent rest breaks, especially when lifting heavy, water-laden objects.
- Practice good lifting techniques to avoid overexertion and back injuries.
- Provide first-aid kits to care for minor cuts and abrasions.
- Beware of overhead and underground lines, especially when moving ladders or equipment near them.
- Re-evaluate the fire evacuation plan and suppression that will be used during clean up.
- Inform employees in areas where debris is being collected and deposited of any special hazards they may encounter during recovery efforts.



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- Protect employees exposed to vehicular traffic during the clean-up operations by posting warning signs along roadways to warn drivers of work in progress.
- Use flaggers, traffic cones and highway channeling devices to steer traffic away from employees working along the roadway.
- Develop and use a site plan for collection of debris – provide traffic flow details and train employees to stay clear of all motorized equipment.
- Train employees to never position themselves between mechanical equipment, blind spots, and a fixed object.
- Provide all employees with high-visibility reflective vests to be easily spotted by equipment operators, emergency vehicles, vehicular drivers, and others.
- Provide all employees with personal protective equipment, including hard hats, safety glasses, work boots and gloves.
- Ensure all motorized equipment has operational “back-up” alarms, so nearby employees are aware of movements.
- Provide radio equipment and extra batteries to all spotters and equipment operators, so warnings can be communicated.



Photo courtesy NOAA/West Tyler, Photographer

- Require the use of seatbelts and rollover protection for all equipment where hazards of tip-over are present.
- Do not allow employees to enter debris piles while the debris is being worked by mechanical equipment.
- Train employees to recognize, report, and avoid hazardous chemicals discovered during debris clean up.
- Train equipment operators, spotters, and employees to keep equipment more than 10 feet away from overhead power lines.
- Stay hydrated.
- Be aware of possible biological hazards (i.e., dead animals).

Assume all wires and power lines are energized!

The Texas Department of Insurance Occupational Safety and Health Consultation (OSHCON) program can help small employers (250 or fewer per worksite and no more than 500 employees corporate-wide) that are affected by a hurricane or tornado. The experienced, professional OSHCON consultants can provide

occupational health or safety assistance by identifying hazards that result from damage and destruction caused by a storm and specific hazards employees may be exposed to during recovery and cleanup.

This factsheet was produced with information from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation, and is considered accurate at the time of publication.