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August 29, 2012

State Health Department Offers Safety Tips to Prevent Injuries, Accidents during Storm Cleanup

BATON ROUGE, La. -- The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals urges people returning to residences damaged by Hurricane Isaac to be aware of health and safety dangers that wind, rain and floodwaters can cause.

"A tremendous number of accidents occur in the first few days after people return home from a storm like this," said DHH Secretary Bruce D. Greenstein. "We urge people to watch out for downed electrical lines and damaged wiring in their home, propane or other gas leaks, flooded home septic systems and to take precautions when clearing debris. These are all common causes of accidents and injuries after a storm. Be responsible and be safe while you recover."

The following are good safety reminders for cleaning residences and property after Hurricane Isaac:

Home Utilities: Gas, Septic and Electric Safety:

- If you are returning to a storm-damaged house, be particularly careful. Before entering the building, check for structural damage to be sure there is no danger of collapse. Turn off any outside gas lines at meter or tank, and let the house air out for a few minutes.
- If the electricity is off in your neighborhood, make sure your electrical power is turned off at the main breaker or fuse box.
- Don't turn on any lights, appliances or gas systems until they've been tested.
- If the house has been flooded, electrical wires and appliances must be cleaned and thoroughly dried before they can be safely used again.

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- If surface water is present, or your home plumbing system is not working, do not try to use your septic system.
- If you are grilling to cook during a power loss, use a charcoal or gas grill only in an open, well-ventilated area. Never use a grill inside your home or other interior area like a garage.
- Do not connect an external generator to your home's electrical system. Connect appliances directly to the generator with properly sized polarized extension cords. Be sure the generator is properly grounded. Before refueling, let the engine cool for at least two minutes to prevent fires. Store extra fuel in a safe, dry area.

Debris Removal and Household Safety:

- Avoid debris and flooded areas, which can camouflage hazards like broken glass or jagged limbs. Watch out for loose or dangling power lines.
- Exercise particular caution in using power tools or tackling large debris, which can shift suddenly and cause you to fall or topple onto you. Use safety equipment. If you aren't trained to properly use a power tool, you should seek help from a professional cleanup crew. Do not attempt to climb on top of your roof to remove debris. Always get a professional to do this for you.
- When cleaning up debris, wear sturdy shoes or boots and protective clothing such as heavy pants, long sleeves and gloves when cleaning up debris.
- Do not attempt to handle a downed power line. Only a trained electrician should do this.
- Don't drink alcoholic beverages before or while you are using power tools.
- Handling and cleaning contaminated materials can result in potentially dangerous exposures to mold, bacteria, viruses and other contaminants. Individuals who have respiratory allergies or other respiratory illnesses should not handle or disturb materials that have visible mold growth.
- Do not leave children unattended. Do not allow them to play in or explore damaged or flooded areas. Keep chemicals used for cleaning and disinfecting, fuel for generators, and pest-control substances out of reach of children.
- Be aware that floodwaters can force wild animals like snakes, alligators, raccoons or bears out of their natural habitats and into areas populated with people. The animals will be frightened and more likely to bite and be aggressive. Do not attempt to pet, pick up or otherwise make contact with a wild animal. If you are bitten, seek medical attention immediately.

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