

Health and safety in the Gulf Coast

Conditions in the Gulf Coast are changing constantly. There are many safety issues following the hurricanes, including mold, possible toxins in the homes and ground, debris throughout the city, and the lack of usual medical care and police protection.

Some things to keep in mind:

General

- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Know where you are. In case of emergency, 911 emergency services are working in most areas but you will need to identify to the operator exactly where you are, especially if calling from a cell phone.
- Don't wander into unknown areas. There are many areas that have been deemed to be dangerous to enter. Stick with your group.
- Carry ID with you and have phone numbers to local contacts at all times.
- Your cell phone may not always work. We will provide you with landline numbers where you can be contacted in case of an emergency.
- Trip and fall hazards. Before you walk in a new area, use your eyes to look for potential trip and fall hazards. Either go around the hazards (use another path) or remove the hazard.
- Wear sturdy shoes. The most common injury following a disaster is cut feet.
- Watch out for animals, especially poisonous snakes, that may have come into buildings with the floodwaters. Use a stick to poke through debris. Floodwaters flush snakes and many animals out of their homes. Use bug spray as well, and watch for fire ants, wasps, bees, and spiders.

Transportation

- Be careful where you are driving as there is a tremendous amount of hazardous debris in the city and on the roads.
- If you are driving be aware that many traffic signals are not working and there are not always stop signs. Approach every intersection with caution.
- Many streets are still impassable, many streets are cordoned off, and there is a great deal of heavy equipment moving around in the city.

Health and sanitation

- Bring bottled water with you to the work site each day. Do *not* drink water from any of the homes you are working in unless the owner tells you it is safe for drinking.
- Drink lots of water and wear hats. Summers on the Gulf Coast are very hot and humid. Take salt pills if necessary. Avoid caffeinated beverages. Take plenty of breaks and rest in shade.
- Wash your hands before eating.
- Avoid contact with standing "dark" water.
- There are limited medical facilities available but there are emergency treatment centers in case of accident or illness.

- Make sure that your trip leader is aware of any medical conditions/issues that you may have.

Work sites

- You will be working around hazards such as mold. Wear proper protective equipment and wash off with soap and water as soon as possible after working.
- Don't step on old boards as there could be nails that you can't see.
- Handle any contaminated materials with either rubber gloves or heavy work gloves.
- Bag up or throw away your work clothes before going home. Your work clothes will be full of mold spores.
- Check with your team leader or member of the church before trying anything that could potentially be dangerous.
- Be aware that you may encounter buildings that are structurally sound but may have hazards such as falling material, like boards or sheet rock.
- Watch for loose plaster, drywall, and ceilings that could fall.
- Chainsaws are one of the most dangerous power tools used during cleanup. Always wear proper safety equipment, learn to safely operate the saw, and keep it in good working condition.
- When entering buildings, use extreme caution. Watch carefully every step you take, looking for loose wires and exposed nails, among other dangers.
- Wear protection around mold. Many kinds of fungi, including mildew and molds, flourish following flooding. Inhaling molds from building materials, decaying vegetation, waste material, and other fungus-contaminated debris can cause sickness in cleanup workers.
- If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Alert your team leader and/or site manager.
- Be suspicious of power lines. Always assume they are energized. Avoid all containers. Let the owner handle these. Use your eyes to look for loose wiring. If you are not a trained electrician, *do not touch* exposed wiring or electrical equipment.
- If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell burning insulation, alert your team leader and/or site manager.
- Check for sewage and waterline damage. If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using the toilets and tell the owner.