Checking Damaged Buildings

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS FOR ENTERING DAMAGED BUILDINGS:

1. Check for structural damage. Make sure the building is not in danger of collapse. If you are unsure of the structural integrity of the building, do not enter. A building inspector, architect, engineer or professional contractor may need to inspect the building before you enter.

2. If you must enter a building at night, carry a battery-operated flashlight. Do not use a flame as a source of light. Do not smoke.

3. Turn off any outside gas lines at the tank or meter. Let the building air for several minutes to remove gas fumes or odors.

4. Look for obvious electrical problems, shorts, or broken wires. Stay clear of broken wires and obvious problems. Have a licensed electrician inspect and repair any damage to your electrical system.

5. Watch for loose ceiling material.

6. Open as many doors and windows as possible to remove moisture, odors, and flammable or toxic gases. If windows are stuck tight, take off window strips and remove the entire window sash. If a door is stuck, drive out the door's hinge pins with a screwdriver and hammer, and remove the door.

FLOOD DAMAGE:

Foundations

If you are not qualified to judge the stability of a foundation, hire a contractor to make this inspection. Examine foundations and supports for undermining. If walls or foundations have settled or cracked, stay clear and call a professional contractor.

Walls and Ceilings

7. Wash out mud, dirt, and debris as soon as possible. Clean walls and floors before mud and silt dries.

8. Start cleaning from the top floor or upper limits of flooding and work down toward the first floor.

9. Check walls with a level or plumb bob.

10. Brace walls as necessary.

11. To speed up drying of flooded or wet studding and insulation, remove all siding strips or plaster from upper and lower parts of the walls. Do not repaint walls until they are completely dry. This could take several months if the building has been flooded. Wet insulation is probably ruined and should be discarded.

Floors

Flooded or wet wooden floors will dry out slowly. Drying too quickly could cause the floors to crack or split from uneven drying. If the central heating system is working, keep the temperature of the house at 60 - 70 degrees to hasten drying without causing additional problems.

12. To prevent further buckling and warping, drive nails where the floor tends to lift or bulge.

13. After floors are completely dry, plane or sand them level.

14. If floors are too badly damaged to be refinished, lay a new floor over the old, or cover with carpet, vinyl or linoleum.

15. If a concrete floor is badly damaged, break it up and install a new floor. If the damage is minor, patch the floor with a rich mixture of concrete containing no coarse gravel aggregate.

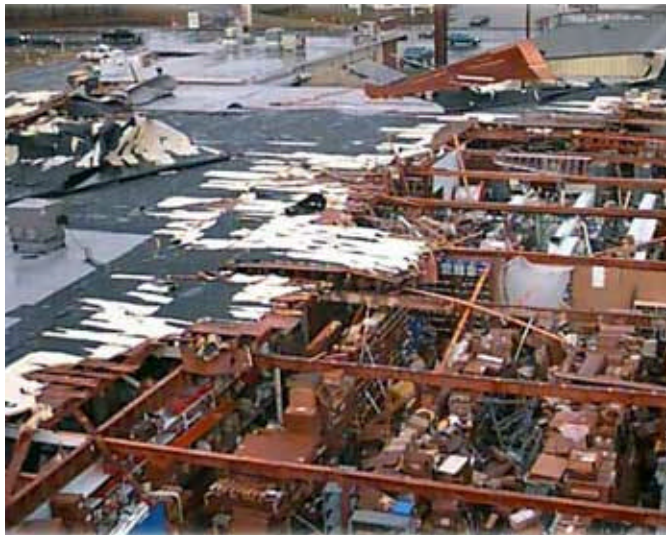
WIND DAMAGE:

Wind damage to buildings is not always readily apparent. After a severe windstorm, hurricane, or tornado, examine all buildings for hidden damage. Undetected damage could weaken a structure, creating a hazard. Prompt repair, even if only temporary, is usually less expensive in the long run.

Roof

Inspect the roof. Check the roof on the inside and outside. Don't check the roof from the ground unless the structure has severe damage to the walls or foundation, or it is too steep or too high to climb. If a ground inspection is necessary, use binoculars. When checking the roof, look for:

16. Damaged or missing shingles. Check asphalt shingles for cracks at the butt end where they may be weak from flexing. Make sure individual shingles have not blown off. Thoroughly inspect shingles on the ridge, gable ends, and eaves.



Use plastic sheeting or roll roofing for temporary repair on solid deck roofs covered with asphalt shingles, wood shingles, or roll roofing. Use patching compounds to repair minor leaks. Look for loose nails on metal roofing. Inspect the entire roof, with particular attention to gable ends, eaves, and ridge cap. If the nails are loose, hammer them back in as soon as possible. If the nails don't hold when hammered back in, take the nails out and put #12 or #14 metal screws in the old nail holes. Use aluminum screws on aluminum roofing, and steel screws on steel roofing. Re-nail the roofing material 3 to 4 inches away from the old nail holes with ring or screw type nails. Replace damaged metal roofing.

17. Potential leaks. On a sunny day, go outside the building, close the doors, and inspect the roof carefully. While looking for holes in the roof, inspect the ridge, gable ends, and eaves, for possible structural separation.

Foundation

Inspect the foundation. The plate should not be separated from the studding where the foundation meets the walls. On block foundations, inspect the mortar joints to make sure the block with the plate bolt hasn't separated from the wall. On stone or concrete foundations, check to see that the plate bolts are not loose.

Interior

Inspect the interior of the building for structural damage. Check the framing for ridge separation, loose knee braces, and loose rafters or trusses where they join the walls.