

Safety after the Tornado

Widespread damage and power outages from tornadoes raise a variety of health and safety concerns. According to the Alabama Department of Public Health, several precautions are frequently needed after natural disasters. These include recommendations about food safety, chain saw safety, carbon monoxide, and power line safety.

Food safety

Power outages raise concerns about the safety of frozen and refrigerated foods. As a general rule, a full upright or chest freezer will keep food frozen for about two days without power while a partially full freezer will keep foods frozen for about one day. Opening the freezer door will shorten these times. Any thawed foods that have been at room temperature for more than two hours should be discarded. Foods that have thawed to refrigerator temperatures (no more than 40 degrees F) can be cooked and then refrozen.

Power Line Hazards

- Treat any downed wire as if it is energized because you can't tell by looking if a downed wire is live or not. Telephone or cable television wires that are touching a power line could become energized and should also be avoided. Notify Alabama Power, your local emergency agency, or call 911 to report the location of any downed lines.
- Don't attempt to repair the electrical system or pull tree limbs off lines. Let our trained work crews perform this potentially dangerous work.
- Stay clear of areas where there is a lot of debris or downed trees because it could conceal an energized power line. Also stay clear of chain link fences that may be energized if touching a downed line.
- If you have an electric generator, please ensure that you have isolated your home or business from the utility electrical service lines by opening main breakers or other devices. Do not connect portable generators to your household electrical wiring. This can cause serious injury to you and to our employees working on the lines in your neighborhood. Connect only essential appliances - such as freezers and refrigerators — directly to the generator.

Chainsaw Safety

People using a chain saw should know how to operate it. Follow these safeguards:

- Choose the proper size saw to match the job.
- Wear appropriate protective equipment, including hard hat, safety glasses, hearing protection, heavy work gloves, cut-resistant leg wear (chain saw chaps) that extends from the waist to the top of the foot, and boots which cover the ankle.
- Always cut at waist level or below to ensure secure control over the saw.
- Bystanders or coworkers should remain at least two tree lengths (minimum 150 feet) away from a tree being felled and at least 30 feet from anyone using a chain saw to remove limbs or cut up a fallen tree.
- Beware of injury from the release of bent trees or branches.

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless, toxic gas that is produced by fuel-burning appliances and automobiles. After power is lost, many people use items that could produce carbon monoxide. Exposure to carbon monoxide can cause flu-like symptoms and ultimately lead to coma and death.

Camping stoves, portable propane gas stoves and charcoal grills should not be used in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces. Do not use portable generators in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces, or in areas where exhaust can vent into houses through garage doors, windows, or air-intake vents. A generator should be placed as far away from the home as possible.