



Cleaning Up After the Flood

Proper Handling and Disposal of Sandbags

After the floodwaters dissipate, homeowners and communities are typically responsible for the cleanup. This includes the proper handling and disposal of emergency sandbags.

Because sandbags may rot or breakdown and become unstable over time, they should be removed from use as soon as the threat of flooding is gone. It is especially important to remove sandbags near roadways and waterways since loose or leaking sand can create dangerous conditions for drivers and possibly affect streams, wetland and storm drains.

In most instances, sand used for flood protection can be treated as clean soil and be used as general fill (not along watercourses or in floodplains), substitute aggregate in construction applications or blending into gardening.

Use caution when reusing sand that came in contact with flood waters. Sand that may not look or smell any different, may still have come in contact with fecal coliform or other bacteria. Spreading the sand on the ground and allowing it to be exposed to the sunlight will reduce health risks. Bacteria present will diminish with time and exposure to the elements. But even with reduced risk, you should avoid placing sand in playgrounds, sandboxes or other areas where there might be direct human contact after removal from bags.

If you suspect the sandbags have come in contact with industrial wastes, fuel, oil or other chemicals, sandbags must be disposed at a permitted waste handling facility. Contact your local landfill or other disposal site for detailed disposal instructions or check with your municipality.

Tips

- Wear gloves and boots to protect yourself from scrapes and contaminants
- Sand that has been in contact with floodwater's containing bacteria, hazardous chemicals, sewage, septic waste, and oil or fuel products can cause health problems and environmental damage if not handled properly
- Because of the possibility of contamination and the health and environmental risks they pose, sand from sandbags should never be used in sandboxes, playgrounds, or other areas where it will be on the ground surface or directly in contact with people. It can only be used in construction projects
- Sand should not be disposed of in a wetland, waterway, flood plain or other environmentally sensitive or protected area.
- Do not dispose of sand into your local watercourse
- Unused, empty sandbags can be saved for future use, recycled, or disposed of
- Clean, filled sandbags can be saved and reused at other flood sites for up to six months
- The sand can be used for fill, to cover icy roads and sidewalks, mixed into concrete or mortar, as a base for sidewalks or pavement, or for cover in a landfill
- Check with your municipality to see if unused sandbags may be returned to their local work depots.

Although sandbags can be stored for reuse, mold can become a problem if they are stored when still damp. Dry out sand bags as much as possible before storage. If emptied and dried, the sacks can be filled again. Otherwise, they may rot after a period of time because of the damp sand. If not using the sandbag again, dispose of the empty sandbag properly to prevent litter problems. Empty sandbags can be disposed of with normal trash.

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