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MEMORANDUM

To: Local Health Department Directors of Environmental Health

From: Marlena Bordson, Acting Chief
Division of Environmental Health

Date: June 13, 2008

Subject: Cleaning Up After a Flood

Concerns about personal health and safety may increase in the days and weeks following recent flooding. The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) provides the following information which may be useful to citizens.

These basic precautions can help to prevent disease:

- Minimize skin contact with flood water, especially cuts and sores. Keep them clean and covered.
- Do not allow children to play in flood water.
- Do not eat or drink anything exposed to flood water.
- Keep contaminated objects, water and hands away from your mouth, eyes and nose.
- Wash hands frequently, especially after bathroom use, before eating and immediately following contact with flood water or contaminated objects or surfaces.

Take the following precautions to prevent injury:

- Turn off main power switches if necessary. Air out and wipe dry all appliances and electrical outlets exposed to water before use.
- If you have fuel oil or gas systems, be sure tanks are secure and all lines are free from breaks.
- Wear rubber boots, gloves and an N95 or HEPA respirator mask during removal and cleanup.
- Open windows if possible to ventilate and dry the area. Fans can be used to help with drying.

The following cleaning guidelines may help prevent the transmission of disease and reduce property loss:

General Cleaning:

- Discard any contaminated objects that cannot be thoroughly washed or laundered.
- Wash contaminated surfaces and objects with warm, soapy water and disinfect with a bleach and water solution made of no more than 1 cup of bleach per 1 gallon of water. For objects that would be damaged by bleach, use a home or laundry disinfectant.
- Make sure to read and follow label instructions. Do not use ammonia. Do not mix ammonia and bleach; the vapors are hazardous.
- Scrub and wash all objects in the affected area of your home, including clothes, exposed to flood waters. Use warm, not hot, tap water with soap.

Specific Cleaning:

Carpets and Rugs

Carpets and rugs that cannot be thoroughly dried and cleaned should be discarded and replaced. If the damaged area is small, you may be able to save the carpet by cleaning the area with a mild detergent. There also are professional home cleaning services that may be able to clean your carpets.

Floors, Drapes and Furniture

Floors and hard surfaces should be cleaned with a bleach and water solution made of no more than one cup of bleach per one gallon of water, or use a household disinfectant. A professional cleaner may be able to clean furniture and drapes.

Basement

Pump out standing water and remove all debris. Wait to pump until flood waters have receded below basement level. Allow debris to drain before disposal. Strain away all liquids from trash. After straining trash, wrap in newspaper and store in tight-lid garbage cans until pick up. Paneling and wallboard must be immediately cleaned and dried thoroughly. If the damage is severe, they should be removed and replaced.

Food and Water Safety

Use only bottled or disinfected water for drinking, cooking, tooth brushing and bathing until you are sure the water supply is safe.

Discard food exposed to contaminated waters. If refrigerators or freezers have taken in water, discard food stored there. If no water entered these appliances, but power was lost long enough for foods to thaw, discard all partially thawed foods unless prepared immediately. Discard milk, cheeses and other foods prone to spoilage. Completely thawed meats and vegetables should be discarded without question. Discard all bulging or leaking canned food and any food stored in jars. Undented, intact cans can be cleaned with a bleach solution before use.

IDPH offers two additional publications which may also be useful after a flood:

After the Flood – (<http://www.idph.state.il.us/pdf/aftflood.pdf>)

Common Questions and Answers about Indoor Mold – (http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/factsheets/mold_qa_fs.htm)