

# Stay Safe After Severe Storms

**Electrical hazards associated with storms could cause serious injuries**



Photo by Kevin Bernson

**S**afe Electricity cautions everyone to be mindful of the electrical hazards that storms and flooding can leave in their wake, and offers vital safety tips to avoid electrocution and serious injury when dealing with the aftermath of a major storm or disaster.

“The danger does not end when the storm does,” says Molly Hall, Executive Director of Safe Electricity. “People can be hurt or killed by hazards left behind. It’s wise to be cautious in any clean-up effort.”

Stay away from downed power lines and be alert to the possibility that tree limbs or debris may hide an electrical hazard. Treat all downed or hanging power lines as if they are energized. Warn others to stay away and contact the electric utility.

Keep in mind a downed power line that’s energized can cause other things around it to become potentially hazardous. A fence or guardrail touching a downed line can be energized for several thousand yards, and this poses a threat to anyone coming into contact with these structures. Also, stay away from puddles of water in contact with downed lines. Encountering these

objects can be as hazardous as coming into contact with the downed power line itself.

If after a storm or disaster, the power to your home is out for a prolonged period, know important safety rules, such as never using a charcoal or gas grill to cook inside! And if you use a standby generator, make sure a transfer safety switch is used, or connect the appliance(s) directly to the generator. This prevents electricity from traveling back through the power lines, what’s known as “back feed.” Back feed creates danger for anyone near lines, particularly crews working to restore power.

“Before re-entering storm-damaged buildings or rooms, be sure all electric and gas services are turned off,” says Hall. “Never attempt to turn off power at the breaker box if you must stand in water to do so. If you can’t reach your breaker box safely, call your electric utility to shut off power at the meter.”

- Never step into a flooded basement or other area if water is covering electrical outlets, appliances or cords.

- Be alert to any electrical equipment that could be energized and in contact with water. Never touch electrical appliances, cords or wires while you are wet or standing in water.

- If using electric yard tools in clean-up efforts, do not operate them if it’s raining or ground is wet, or while you are wet or standing in water. Keep all electric tools and equipment at least 10 feet away from wet surfaces.

“Cleaning up and using water-damaged appliances also carry safety risks,” says Hall. “Electric motors in appliances that have been drenched or submerged should be thoroughly cleaned and reconditioned before they are put back into service. It may be necessary to repair or replace electrical appliances or tools that have been in contact with water. Do not use any water-damaged appliance until a professional has checked it out.”

For more information on electrical safety, visit the [www.SafeElectricity.org](http://www.SafeElectricity.org).



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