

Returning to a damaged home

ACTION CHECKLIST

Do not enter a building with gas smell, floodwater, unstable walls, damaged wiring or other serious hazards. A quiet street or an opened road is not proof that a home is safe. Inspect only from a safe outside position and arrange qualified assessment for structural and utility damage. Keep children and pets away.

[] Check the approach

Avoid debris, unstable trees, wires, floodwater and suspicious remnants after conflict. Do not cross a hazard to inspect a property.

[] Look from outside

Check for leaning walls, sagging roof, fire, gas smell and water around electrical equipment. Do not enter to locate the source of a hazard.

[] Keep utilities untouched if unsafe

Do not turn on damaged power, gas or flooded equipment. Qualified personnel must assess these systems; do not test them yourself.

[] Document only when safe

Photograph visible damage from a safe position and retain receipts. Property records are less urgent than staying out of danger.

[] Use a temporary safe base

Keep sleeping, food and water in safe accommodation while assessment and cleanup are arranged. Separate clean belongings from contaminated items.

WATCH FOR

Do not remove load-bearing debris, enter a confined space or approach explosive debris. Personal inspection cannot certify structural safety.

IF HELP IS UNAVAILABLE

Remain in the safest available temporary shelter if inspection services are not operating. Delayed assessment is not permission to occupy a visibly unsafe home.

Updated 2026-10-02 | Civilian educational guidance. Seek qualified help when reachable and safe; do not delay immediate protective action.

Full guide: <https://ospreyzero.com/emergencies/returning-home/>

Ready.gov · Recovering from disaster

CDC · Flood safety