



Hurricane Aftermath—Health and Housing Pest Infestations and Integrated Pest Management

Pest infestations often follow in the wake of a natural disaster that damages houses and apartment buildings. Mice, rats, and cockroaches are three common pest infestations that can plague any damaged residential structure.

To prevent pests and to combat pest infestations that have already occurred, property owners should use integrated pest management (IPM) strategies:

- Remove all standing water as quickly as possible, even if the amount of standing water is small. Standing water can be a breeding ground and a source of sustenance for some pests.
- Remove all wet materials and personal belongings from the house or apartment building. This includes all wet wallpaper, wallboard, carpeting, throw rugs, bedding, mattresses, box springs, stuffed toys, clothing, and any other wet materials that cannot be adequately dried. Inadequate drying of these materials can attract large cockroach infestations.
- Take appropriate measures to dry out the entire structure of the house or apartment building. As soon as safe, reliable power is restored, fans; dehumidifiers; window air conditioners; and undamaged, uncontaminated, properly filtered HVAC systems can be used to dry out a building. All houses and apartment buildings should also have ventilation systems repaired if damaged.
- Repair and/or fill all holes, cracks, broken windows and doors, and other points of entry to the house or apartment building.
- Discard all spoiled food, and keep any edible food properly stored in tightly sealed containers.
- If pest infestations are already present, avoid the use of high-toxicity pesticides. Instead, use gel baits and bait stations for cockroaches and ants, and employ traps and tamper-proof bait boxes for mice and rats.
- When baiting rodents, use only those lower-toxicity pesticides that have known and readily available antidotes. **Do not** use bulk rat poison pellets to combat rodents; these pellets are highly toxic and do not contain any bittering agents or other safeguards to prevent children or pets from ingesting them.

Resources

- For more information on making homes healthy following a hurricane strike, visit the EPA's Hurricane Katrina response page, linked from www.epa.gov.
- The Alliance for Healthy Homes and the National Center for Healthy Housing provide more detailed information on health and housing on their websites, www.afhh.org and www.centerforhealthyhousing.org.
- Beyond Pesticides provides in-depth information on combating specific pests without high-toxicity pesticides. Visit www.beyondpesticides.org.