

BUILDERS POINT OF VIEW

AFTER THE STORM

By Alex Guthrie

The weather report predicts scattered showers and maybe heavy rain in some areas. You're looking forward to the cooling off as you hear distant thunder. The sweet smell of moisture in the air contrasts the dry dust you've become accustomed to breathing and you always look forward to the next morning. As you settle into bed with a good book you're anticipating a deep nights' sleep with the sound of the rain pattering on your roof.

As you awake you're thinking it must be a nightmare and praying you'll come to your senses soon. The water on your floor and the clothing floating in it can't be real, the smell of mud and sewage, when suddenly you realize your house is flooding, it is real and it is happening and there's nothing you can do about it, its 1:00 AM.

You're not ready for this, it's never happened before, why now? It's July for goodness sake!

These late summer showers can spring up at a moments notice and before you know it, so much rain has fallen that even the frogs are chocking and your house is right in the path of the flood. This has happened to many homeowners including me and there is not a more helpless feeling when you realize you just lost control of your life. You are now at the mercy of others to help and advise you, the enormity of it all is overwhelming and you wonder; what could I have done and what should I do now?

Some tips that might help you survive after the storm--

Keep a few items at hand in case you are stranded in your home, a good waterproof flashlight, battery operated radio, a cell phone and candles. Less obvious items that might be helpful would be a spare pair of shoes, and cotton or rubber gloves. Think about storing some drinking water with your other emergency items.

Beware of electricity if you have high water or downed power lines. Don't approach any electrical lines; if you can't get past them safely wait for emergency crews to assist you. Remember that many people are electrocuted trying to traverse energized power lines. Don't ignore the very things you use every day. Recently, I was helping some flood victims in their house when I noticed some of the volunteers moving lamps and other electrical fixtures that were still plugged in and working while standing in wet mud. The first thing you should do is turn off the electricity to your home.

Natural and propane gas has a way of floating into odd places or "pockets", so find your gas meter and make sure you turn off the service to your home. Gas leaks have produced many secondary emergencies.

You should be aware of where the utilities to your home can be disconnected or turned off. Assessing damage is for professionals but you should be aware of whether or

not your dwelling is safe to stay in. If you see obvious damage such as sags or cracks in your ceiling or trees that have landed on your roof, stay clear. Beware of trees that have fallen into other trees, they can fall at any time and without provocation.

The plaster ceiling in the dining room of a house I was rebuilding fell completely to the floor 8 or 10 days after we started the project; it took that long for the weight of the water used to put out the fire to finally dislodge it. I learned to be very wary anytime I enter a house that has had water intrusion from the roof.

Carpet pads absorb water like a sponge since they are made of foam rubber. If you get water on your carpet you should pull it back and remove the padding. The mold created by the trapped moisture appears remarkably fast and smells awful; the padding is simple and cheap to replace.

If you experience a natural disaster you will be approached by many well-meaning people with offers of service and advice. You will also be approached by many people out for an easy buck. Do not hire anyone until you check their references and have a written quote that you understand. The state of Texas has very specific laws regarding construction contracts that are in place to protect the consumer, make sure any documents you sign are in compliance. Read the document completely and ask questions, if you don't understand the verbiage ask someone who does.

Most insurance policies have maximum coverage's so you must manage these funds carefully. If you use all the dollars up front in the clean up, you won't have money to rebuild.

There are many onerous things that have to be dealt with such as the cleaning and storage of personal items, furniture, heirlooms, and replacement of items that can't be salvaged. Depending on your insurance policy, this may or may not be covered.

Make your plans carefully, its normal to get in a hurry to get back in your home but sometimes it's better to step back and make sure you have the money available and a good plan in place for the work to be completed.