Checklist: Counseling for Healthy Homes After a Disaster

Counselors should review information on rebuilding post-disaster before counseling.

- Use HUD's Rebuild Healthy Homes: Guide to Post-Disaster Restoration for a Safe and Healthy Home to learn about post-disaster hazards, responses, and the principles guiding safe restoration. Also see the companion Rebuild Healthy Homes app.
- Consider printing Consumer Tips for Post-Disaster Home Restoration, a 12-page brochure to share with the client. It is brief but effective guidance on the most important actions and precautions your clients should take as they address hazards in their home. The brochure provides links to three short, useful videos, created by HUD, on returning to your flood-damaged home, addressing mold after a natural disaster, and restoring your home after a natural disaster.

Use this checklist to walk your client through key considerations in rebuilding a safe and healthy home.

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KNOW THE PRINCIPLES FOR REBUILDING A HEALTHY HOME *Introduce the importance of healthy homes, the potential hazards post-disaster, and the steps your client can take to return to a healthy home.*	
✓ Talk through the Consumer Tips for Post-Disaster Home Restoration. ✓ Highlight the 10 tips on page 2. ✓ Highlight the seven potential hazards listed on pages 4 and 5 (mold, asbestos, lead-based paint, water quality, home safety, utilities, and radon). ✓ Discuss the key areas listed below.	
PROTECT YOURSELF *Inform your client of personal safety precautions to take before entering the home or doing any work. [Refer to pages 10–14 of Rebuild Healthy Homes and pages 6–9 of Consumer Tips for Post-Disaster Home Restoration.]*	
✓ Before entering your home, check for structural damage and make sure it is not in danger of collapsing (see *Assess Structural Stability* below).	

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✓ Turn off any outside gas lines and let the house air for several minutes to remove escaping gas. Do not use an open flame as a light source; use a battery-operated flashlight. ✓ When clearing debris, wear protective clothing on arms, hands, legs, and feet. ✓ When entering areas with mold, lead, asbestos, and other contaminants, wear full protective gear, including protection for eyes, skin, and lungs. ✓ Avoid common work accidents with chainsaws, other power tools, ladders, and equipment. Inspect your equipment and follow instructions for proper use.	
ASSESS DAMAGES *Review the steps your client should take to assess damages to the home and potential hazards. These steps are critical to maintaining safety and planning restoration work. [Refer to pages 15–21 of Rebuild Healthy Homes.]*	
Assess structural stability. ✓ Look for evidence of structural damage, such as a sagging roof, walls that are not straight, stuck doors, missing support beams, and cracks in the foundation. ✓ Do not enter a building that might have structural damage. Hire a licensed contractor or engineer to address problems. You will likely need building permits and inspections for the work. ✓ Even if you deem the building safe, remain alert to hazards such as weakened spots in the floor, slippery conditions, and sharp debris.	
Conduct appropriate inspections and inquire about any safety concerns ✓ Check for creatures in the home. Snakes, mice, rats, cockroaches, and other pests tend to hide in debris. ✓ Be aware of chemicals and biohazards. Floodwaters may have been contaminated with chemicals, fuel, or infectious bacteria. ✓ Look for downed power lines, gas leaks, and water leaks. Notify the appropriate utility company if you see a problem. Do not touch downed wires. Shut off gas or water lines if necessary. ✓ Find out if the community water supply is safe to use and drink. ✓ Examine heating and cooling units and ductwork for damage. Look for signs of mold.	
ASSESS HEALTH HAZARDS *Review common post-disaster health hazards, what to look for, and what to do if hazards are found. [Refer to pages 21–30 of Rebuild Healthy Homes.]*	
Mold. Mold is common if a house was flooded during the disaster. Exposure to mold can cause allergic reactions and illness. ✓ Look for discoloration and growth on surfaces, as well as hidden mold behind, above, and beneath materials such as wallpaper, drywall, paneling, flooring, and components like cabinets. A musty odor is also a sign of mold.	

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✓ Act quickly to remove mold and dry out the home. The longer mold is allowed to grow, the greater the health risk and the harder to remedy. ✓ Do not wait for insurance claims adjusters. Take photos and begin clean-up. ✓ If you do the work yourself, follow work practices to protect your health. [see 10 Steps for Safe and Effective Mold Removal on pages 51 and 52 of Rebuild Healthy Homes.] ✓ If you hire a contractor, check on your state or locality's licensing and certification requirements.	
Lead. If your home was built before 1978, it could contain lead-based paint. If the home has not been certified lead-free by a certified lead professional, assume it has lead-based paint. Exposure to lead can result in lead poisoning, which is particularly dangerous to children and can result in illness and developmental delays. ✓ Look for damage to painted surfaces, as those are lead hazards. Also, any soil or silt that washed into the home should be assumed to be lead-contaminated. ✓ Repair damaged surfaces to prevent the spread of lead dust and debris. ✓ Clean up soil and silt. ✓ If you plan to clean and make the repairs yourself, learn about lead safe work practices. ✓ If you hire a contractor to do the work, hire an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)- or state-certified lead safe renovator.	
Asbestos. Asbestos is a mineral fiber that was used in building products until approximately 1980. Building components damaged during a disaster can release asbestos fibers into the air, increasing the risk of lung cancer and other diseases. ✓ Look for building products that may contain asbestos, such as insulation, fireproofing materials, soundproofing ceiling tiles, textured paints, and heat-resistant tiles. ✓ If a component is in good condition, do not touch it. It is best not to disturb it. ✓ If the component is damaged, assume it is asbestos or get it tested at an EPA-accredited lab. Follow instructions for safe testing. ✓ Hire a certified or trained contractor to remove asbestos components safely.	
Radon. Radon is an invisible gas that can leak into the home, especially if the disaster damaged the foundation, basement, or sump pump. The only way to find radon in the home is to test for it. ✓ Test for radon before rehabilitation work because it is easier to incorporate radon mitigation during renovation than it is to do it later. ✓ Testing for radon requires closing the windows, so if the home is too damaged for testing, consider testing only the basement or first floor. ✓ Test kits are available from home improvement stores. ✓ Repair any damage to the foundation, basement, crawl space, or radon mitigation system. ✓ Hire a qualified contractor to install a radon mitigation system. Check with your state radon office for qualified contractors.	

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ENGAGE PROFESSIONALS WHEN APPROPRIATE *Review practices for hiring qualified contractors with proper certifications when necessary. It may be difficult to find qualified contractors after a disaster, and clients may be vulnerable to scams. It is important, therefore, to follow good practices in contracting. [Refer to pages 33–34 of Rebuild Healthy Homes and page 3 of the Consumer Tips brochure. For scams, refer to Don't Be a Victim of Cons and Scams, which is a flyer that is available in multiple languages.]*	
General contractors. Know your state and local laws for contractor licensing, bonding, registration, and certification. ✓ Discuss page 3 of the Consumer Tips brochure. ✓ Find homebuilders and remodelers who are members of the National Association of Home Builders and its local chapters at www.nahb.org. ✓ Check with your insurance company or a licensed home inspector for referrals. ✓ Check with the Better Business Bureau and trusted websites for reviews and records of complaints. ✓ Try to interview three or more contractors to compare and evaluate approaches. ✓ Ask for references. ✓ Get a written contract.	
Specialty contractors. When addressing health hazards, make sure you hire contractors with appropriate qualifications. For lead, asbestos, radon, and mold, contact your local health department or see the resources below to find qualified professionals. ✓ **Lead-based paint**. When a home is known or assumed to have lead-based paint, find certified lead-safe renovators to do the work. If the work involves lead abatement, you must hire a certified lead-based paint abatement specialist. See www.epa.gov/lead for help finding firms that are properly certified for the work. ✓ **Asbestos**. If removing or repairing components that are known or assumed to have asbestos, hire an asbestos professional. See www.epa.gov/asbestos for help finding appropriate firms. ✓ **Mold**. Hire a mold inspection or remediation professional affiliated with or certified by recognized industry organizations. Your state also may regulate mold remediation.	
STAY SAFE WHEN DOING WORK *Renovation work can create hazards. Review procedures for staying safe, whether work is being done by the client or a contractor. [Refer to pages 30–50 of Rebuild Healthy Homes.]*	
Plan the work. Think through the work before starting. Consider: ✓ Supplies and materials. Make a list of the supplies and materials you will need, and buy what you can in advance. ✓ Electricity. If the home does not have electricity, consider options for generators. ✓ Storage. Determine how and where items can be stored.	

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✓ Disposal. Determine how and where items can be disposed of. ✓ Site layout. Draw a site plan layout to arrange workstations. ✓ Permits and approvals. Obtain necessary permits and approvals from local authorities.	
Use safe work practices. Avoid injuries or health hazards by working safely. ✓ Prepare the worksite. ✓ Set up containment. ✓ Follow safe work practices for demolition and removal of furniture, carpeting, flooring, ceilings, appliances, and building components. ✓ Follow safe work practices for cleaning and decontamination.	
## REBUILD BETTER *Rebuilding is a chance to make your home better than it was before. Review the key principles of a healthy home. [Refer to pages 53–64 of Rebuild Healthy Homes and page 11 of the Consumer Tips brochure.]*	
A healthy home is: ✓ Safe ✓ Dry ✓ Clean ✓ Pest- and contaminant-free ✓ Properly ventilated ✓ Easy to maintain ✓ Comfortable	
## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES *Refer clients to the additional resources available from HUD, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).*	
Key resources include: • Consumer Tips for Post-Disaster Home Restoration • FEMA Disaster Recovery Information • Homeowner's and Renter's Guide to Mold Cleanup After Disasters – CDC • HUD Disaster Recovery Information • Rebuild Healthy Homes: Guide to Post-Disaster Restoration for a Safe and Healthy Home • HUD's videos on: o Addressing mold after a natural disaster o Restoring your home after a natural disaster o Returning to your flood-damaged home	