

## Safety Message: Safe Hurricane Clean-Up

Make safety a priority when removing hurricane debris. Here are some tips for safe and effective clean-up after a hurricane or other phenomena such as winter storms:

### **Check your environment:**

Before you start any post-disaster clean-up, you need to make sure your environment is safe. When re-entering your home, be cautious and aware of the conditions. Is there potential water or structural damage? Are electrical appliances wet? Can you smell gas or other chemicals? Once you've determined your home is safe, you can start clearing out debris.

### **Protect yourself with the proper gear:**

Disasters create all kinds of debris and you need to prepare accordingly. It's a dirty job so regardless of what you're cleaning up, wear old clothing and gloves to protect yourself. Take extra precautions when handling potentially dangerous items (like propane tanks, car batteries, electrical equipment, or sewage). Use appropriate gear, such as gloves, face masks, boots, and goggles. If you need to operate a chainsaw to remove fallen trees or branches, always follow the manufacturer's instructions, and wear protective clothing, earplugs and safety goggles. Make sure that any bystanders are safely out of the way.

### **Don't try to do it alone:**

The debris created by natural disasters is often heavy and difficult to dispose of. If you try to move larger items (like fridges, dishwashers, concrete or fallen trees) alone, you could seriously hurt yourself. Ask your family, friends, and neighbors for help, and always work in teams. Be aware that certain items can be especially dangerous if handled incorrectly. Damaged fridges may leak freon, electrical appliances can short-circuit, and some things may be too heavy to remove on your own. In these cases, always call a professional service.

### **Pace yourself:**

In disasters of this magnitude, clean-up can take weeks or even months. While it's important to act fast (particularly for hazardous or water-damaged materials), you won't be able to do it all in one go. Start with the most important things and take breaks when needed. Work together with family and neighbors so you feel safe and supported. This is already a stressful and emotional time; pace yourself so you don't get overwhelmed.

**Have a disposal plan:**

There's no way to fully prepare for the effects of a natural disaster, but planning ahead can alleviate some of the stress during hurricane clean-up. Create a list of who to call to dispose of certain items.