

# Disaster Area Volunteers

## Don't Become a Victim of MOLD

The first step in making a successful contribution to a Disaster Relief Team is to identify in what manner you can safely assist without putting your health at undue risk. It's not a matter of whether or not to volunteer—by all means volunteer—just determine the volunteer position best suited for you.

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### Tips to Preserve Your Health While Volunteering

**TIP #1:** The CDC has identified groups of people who may be more adversely affected by mold exposures than most healthy adults. These high-risk people should NOT clean or remediate mold-contaminated structures or even volunteer in the disaster area itself.

The CDC's high-risk groups for mold exposure include the following:

- Infants and children
- Elderly
- Pregnant women
- People with respiratory conditions (allergies, asthma, COPD, etc.)
- People with weakened immune systems
- People recovering from major surgery
- People taking immune-suppressing medication, including oral or nasal steroids

**TIP #2:** Before leaving home to volunteer in the disaster area, try on a P100 elastomeric respirator designated for use in a mold-contaminated environment. If you have difficulty breathing while wearing it, consult your doctor regarding any possible medical restrictions in your volunteer work.

**TIP #3** People not in high-risk groups may be good candidates to volunteer in disaster areas, provided they properly use adequate personal protection equipment (PPE) to protect themselves from contaminants.

**TIP #4:** The EPA recommends using the following level of PPE:

- < 10 sq. ft. → N95 Respirator, nitrile gloves, & goggles
- < 100 sq. ft. → P100 Elastomeric Respirator (full- or half-face w/ goggles), nitrile gloves, disposable coveralls & protective footwear
- > 100 sq. ft. → Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR): a full-face P100 Elastomeric Respirator powered with air, nitrile gloves, Tyvek suit, & protective footwear

Disaster area damage is generally >100 sq. ft. If a PAPR is not available, use a full-face P100 elastomeric respirator with a disposable cartridge. Studies indicate that they provide at least 10x more protection than an N95.

Performing mold removal increases airborne levels of mold, bacteria and other contaminants. Adequately ventilate indoor spaces by opening doors and windows, or use professional air scrubbers with negative airflow.

**TIP #5:** Scientific and medical experts recommend wearing PPE when even just collecting belongings out of a mold-contaminated structure.

**TIP #6:** Use correctly fitting PPE when cleaning or remediating structural mold, even if other people do not use it. Be a good role model. Help spread the word about the importance of using the appropriate level of PPE. It is a health safeguard that should not be ignored.

**TIP #7:** Do not underestimate the health damage that can occur from exposure to water-damaged buildings.

The indoor air can contain concentrated levels of the following:

- Molds and mycotoxins
- Bacteria and bacterial toxins
- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs), such as formaldehyde and other harmful gases
- Chemical toxins and sewage from flood waters

Exposure to concentrated levels of these contaminants can be severely harmful to health. Whenever possible, reduce indoor air contaminants through ventilation or mechanical air filtration if outside air is contaminant-filled from curbside debris.

A HEPA air purifier with several pounds of activated carbon has the ability to reduce levels of both air particulates and toxic gases, reducing risk to health. (Note: Thin charcoal pre-filters are not designed to absorb significant levels of odors or gases.)

**TIP #8:** To reduce the health effects of mold, bacteria, and chemical exposures while in a post-disaster area, create a “cleaner” sleeping room using a properly sized HEPA air purifier with an activated carbon filter. Use of this type of air purifier in your sleeping room will significantly reduce the level of airborne contaminants you inhale during your sleep hours, giving your body the opportunity to recover and repair from exposures that occurred during the day.

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**Disaster Area Volunteers  
help rebuild damaged  
communities and are  
heroes to area residents.  
Keep our heroes healthy.**

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The information in this brochure is adapted from the book *MOLD: The War Within, Lessons Learned from Katrina*. The authors, Kurt and Lee Ann Billings, and their children became seriously ill from mold and chemical exposures after the hurricane. Now recovered, the Billings provide information to mold victims at [www.MoldMentor.com](http://www.MoldMentor.com)

The Billings do educational outreach with the National Organization of Remediators and Mold Inspectors ([www.NORMI.org](http://www.NORMI.org)) to reduce illness from mold and chemical exposures. NORMI is a certifying agency involved in training and certifying indoor environmental professionals since 2004. Download this free brochure at [www.NORMIPROETF.org](http://www.NORMIPROETF.org)

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