



FACT SHEET

Health Concerns due to Fuel Oil Exposure in Homes after Flooding

Recent flooding may have contaminated your home with fuel oils (petroleum products such as kerosene and home heating oil that are used in many types of engines, lamps, heaters, furnaces, and stoves). If you can smell fuel oil in your home, then you may need to take steps to prevent possible health risks from breathing in fumes (vapors) or contacting fuel oils directly with your skin. This fact sheet provides information on how to avoid exposure to fuel oil, and possible short-term and long-term health effects from contact with fuel oil.

Take steps to control fuel oil fumes

- If you smell fuel oil in your home, open doors and windows to ventilate the areas that have fuel oil in them.
- If possible, seal off any air flow between the contaminated area and other living areas of your home to prevent fuel odors from absorbing into clothing, rugs and other home furnishings.
- Act quickly to help lessen long-term odor problems.

Avoid exposure

- Avoid breathing the fuel oil fumes and prevent skin contact.
- If the odor is strong in the living area of your home, consider staying with relatives or friends until the cleaning is complete.
- If you need to enter your home, wear rubber boots, oil-resistant gloves, protective eyewear, and clothing that covers as much skin as possible.
- When the odor disappears or is only slightly noticeable, the house should be safe for occupancy.
- Slight odors should not cause health effects in most people; however, young children, the elderly, and people with health problems may be more sensitive to the health effects of fuel oil exposure than others, and may need to avoid even lightly oiled areas.

How can fuel oils affect human health?

- Health problems caused by exposure to fuel oils are not fully understood.
- Common symptoms caused by short-term exposure to fuel oils include headache, lightheadedness, loss of appetite, poor coordination, and difficulty concentrating.
- Exposure to fuel oil number 1 (i.e., kerosene or JP-5) for periods as short as one hour can make you feel nauseous and irritate skin and eyes.
- Skin contact for short periods can cause itchy, red, sore, or peeling skin.
- These symptoms are not long-lasting and will generally disappear when fuel oil odors are reduced.
- Long-term exposure to fuel oils can damage kidneys, increase blood pressure, and weaken the blood's ability to clot.

When should someone experiencing symptoms seek medical attention?

- Consult with your health care provider if symptoms do not go away soon after exposure to fuel oil has ended.

For more information, please contact the Alaska Environmental Public Health Program at (907) 269-8000.