

**NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS  
DIVISION OF FIRE SAFETY  
OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL**



# **SAFETY ALERT**

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SAFETY ALERT 12-5

## **Unseen Hazards in Structures Damaged by Super Storm Sandy Issued December, 2012**

The Division of Fire Safety has received information from fire departments in areas affected by Super Storm Sandy regarding hazards created when structures were damaged by the storm.

Emergency response personnel should be aware when responding to incidents that damage and resulting hazards inside structures may not be readily observable from the exterior. Floors may have been weakened by exposure to water, have holes in them or may even have collapsed. Drywall or plaster on walls and ceilings may have been degraded by water and moisture exposure posing hazards due to it falling from the surfaces to which it was attached. Wires, debris and water in basements can pose additional hazards to responders. Personnel should also be aware of the presence of common household chemicals, cleaners, flammables and other items such as mold that constitute hazardous materials.

Keeping this in mind, care should be exercised when entering structures even if no obvious damage is observed from the exterior. Basic safety measures; especially in smoky and other limited visibility situations; such as sounding floors, being aware of trip and fall hazards, and generally being aware of the potential for structural instability must be employed.

Additionally, the use of Thermal Imaging Cameras (TIC) is recommended in limited visibility situations to spot voids in floors and other hazards able to be seen with a TIC.

Responders are also reminded that full personal protective equipment should be utilized to provide the best possible protection against injuries resulting from being struck by falling objects, and tripping and falling generally.

Finally, in structures where damage is discovered, responders should post the structure as unsafe and notify the local construction official for any required code enforcement issues.

**PLEASE POST IMMEDIATELY**