



Working in Floodwaters: Safety and Welfare

Summary of the issue

Whilst we continue to support the communities in NSW, particularly of the Northern Rivers during this unprecedented event, it is important for members to be aware of the hazards of working in and around floodwaters. One of the hazards we face is in the contents of the water. Members should consider decontamination and personal hygiene, including the caring for feet following prolonged contact with water.

Nature of the hazard

Members should treat all contact with floodwaters as being contaminated, such things like sewerage, chemicals, animal waste, dead animals may be in the water creating bacteria and potentially causing skin irritations and smells. Members who are exposed to prolonged contact with water may experience infections with their feet such as macerated skin (softening and whitening). Trench foot is a condition that results from your feet being wet for too long. Symptoms can include tingling, pain and swelling.

Decontamination Care

- Ensure appropriate PPE is donned and doffed
- Washing of boots/shoes to remove excess dirt/mud
- Remove clothing and place and seal in a plastic bag to launder at home (have a change of clothes in vehicle)
- Rinsing and washing wetsuits
- Where possible, wash down vehicles onsite and shake out floor mats to remove contaminated run off

Wetsuit decontamination process

- Take wetsuit off in warm shower and leave inside out
- Rinse in cold or warm water, you can use a shampoo or mild detergent to wash the neoprene
- Hang to drip dry
- If your wetsuit still smells, use a touch of disinfectant, and wash again

Personal Hygiene

- Wash hands regularly, especially before eating or drinking
- Cover wounds and avoid getting flood water on wounds
- Wear appropriate PPE/PPC
- Stay hydrated to maintain overall health
- Avoid fatigue to minimise lapses, errors, and other human errors.

Foot Care

- Where possible, air-dry and elevate your feet as often as possible
- Where possible, change wet shoes and socks for dry ones once a day
- Thoroughly clean and dry feet after showering

Whilst supporting the communities of NSW during this severe weather event, it is important we keep ourselves safe and well as we work in and around floodwaters.