

After the Storm: Verify Before Reentry

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Why this matters

A storm can change a familiar site's structure, services and access. Permission to return to an area does not establish that every building or cleanup task is ready for workers.

Objective: Identify the evidence and restrictions needed before reentry or cleanup begins.

Key hazards or failure points

Damaged structures; fallen or hidden utilities; unstable trees or debris; contaminated water; unknown materials; blocked escape; combustion exhaust; renewed weather.

Practical controls

- The site lead coordinates required assessment by appropriate structural, electrical, utility and other specialists. Define the areas and tasks released for work and those that remain restricted.
- Plan cleanup in stages using the actual hazards, equipment and trained people. Control access and exposure before relying on PPE. Roof work, tree work, demolition and hazardous-material work need their own procedures.
- Confirm emergency access, communication and response arrangements for the changed site. Keep combustion equipment from contaminating occupied or partly enclosed areas. Rebrief when conditions change.

Verify It in the Field

Review current authority instructions and the site's actual release record. Match it to the proposed route, area and task. Missing assessment evidence means hold; do not enter damaged areas to prove they are safe.

From established safe access, check boundaries, usable routes and visible changes. Authorized personnel confirm utility and other technical controls. Record specialist findings, restrictions and unresolved conditions.

Check tools, exposure controls, emergency supplies and assigned roles against the cleanup plan. Verify normal communication and exact location information. Ask the crew to explain permitted work, prohibited areas and the next review trigger.

Stop and reassess

Withdraw safely for movement or cracking, unknown services, suspected gas, electrical damage, unstable debris or renewed weather danger. Keep others clear and notify the responsible authority. In suspected gas areas, do not operate switches or create sparks; call for help from safety. Reentry requires appropriate reassessment and release.

Ask the crew

1. Which exact area and task have been released?
2. What technical assessment or control remains unresolved?
3. What change means we withdraw and get a new decision?

Post-event work readiness; not utility repair, tree cutting, demolition or rescue training.

Sources: OSHA hurricane recovery guidance; CDC disaster-cleanup safety guidance.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/post-storm-reentry-cleanup-readiness