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After the Tornado

(Greeley, Colo.) The winds have died down and rain has soaked the area. Families have started moving back to their homes following last week's tornadoes that hit northern Colorado. Getting back to normal can be a challenge.

“Many people had their private financial information fly away from their homes,” says Larimer County extension agent Laurel Kubin, whose home was in the tornado's path. She considers her family one of the lucky ones; three trees were ripped out, a fence, home siding, four windows damaged and part of the garage twisted. They were without power for about 14 hours.

Even if you keep your financial papers in a filing cabinet, a storm the size of the late May tornados could mean that banking information and other personal information could land anywhere. “In my yard I found one person's signed check and another person's debit card,” Kubin says. It's important to report your losses to financial institutions, close accounts and open new ones with new passwords, watch any open accounts for unauthorized activity and contact

the three credit reporting agencies to register a fraud alert. Links to that information are online at www.larimer.org/ext. Click on “Dealing with Disasters” in the center column.

Food Safety

Not sure what to do with stored food if the power has been off? Check the temperature in two or three locations of the freezer to determine if food is safe to eat. Take a look at the packages of food. If foods still contain ice crystals and/or if the freezer is 40 degrees or less and has been at that temperature no longer than one to two days, then food that was safe when it was originally frozen should be safe now. It can be refrozen or cooked and eaten.

If food has been held at 40 degrees or less but kept at this temperature for some time, examine it more closely. If the color or odor of thawed beef, pork, lamb or poultry is poor or questionable, discard the meat away from possible human or animal consumption. If the freezer is above 40 degrees and you know it has been at that temperature more than two hours, then the food probably is not safe. Fruits and bread products are exceptions.

Crop Damage

Hail storms last week in Weld County damaged crops, leaving producers with the challenge of whether to replant or to plant another crop. Severe winds in the path of the tornado and the hail events caused damage to crops and livestock operations along its path. While reports of small to 1.5-inch hail were fairly common along this line, areas of Weld County reported hail the size of baseballs. Luckily these larger stones were the exception and not very widespread.

“For many producers, replant options may be limited by previous herbicide selection, timing and wet fields,” says Weld County agricultural extension agent Fred Petersen. “Many areas received heavy rains with the hail, delaying producers’ reentry into fields. Potential yield

loss of the existing crop vs. replanting costs and potential reduced yields needs to be considered. In some cases, the reduced yield of a hail-damaged field may be higher than the potential yield from replanting. “

Petersen advises a ‘do nothing’ strategy until notifying the proper government agency such as the Farm Service Agency and—if you plan to make a claim—your insurance provider. “Discuss replant options and limits; when they’ll be able to determine the severity of the loss and their assessment of the loss,” he says. “Next, consider your investment in the crop, additional expenses and expected yield at this point.”

Hail damage assessment and management options vary according to plant stage;

- estimate the growth stage;
- assess the damage; and
- consider options if yield potentials are low.

Managing Stress

Navigating through stressful times is a challenge that can take place in the home and at work. Communicating openly about what has happened and discussing the pros and cons of various solutions, whether at the kitchen table, during a staff meeting or at a business gathering can make the difference. “From the research on who copes well with crises, we know that three things make the difference: pileup, resources, and perception,” says Bob Fetsch, Extension Specialist, CSU Department of Human Development & Family Studies.

“Families that cope well with natural disasters like tornadoes pay attention to pileup—the piling up of additional stressors,” he notes “They manage their stress and assure their children that they will take care of them and keep them safe.”

Looking for ways to monitor and “reframe” their negative perceptions/meanings to more positive ones and trying to keep a sense of humor all helps overcome the challenges of dealing with a natural disaster.

For more information, go to <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/consumer/pubcons.html> to download free copies of three Extension fact sheets:

- Transitions and Changes – Practical Strategies (10.214)
- Transitions and Changes—Who Copes Well? (10.215)
- Managing Stress in Tough Times (10.255)

Landscape Damage

Uprooted trees and shrubs are often the result of high winds. “With all of the damage that the storm did, many people are trying to put their trees back together again,” says horticulture Extension agent Carol O’Meara of Boulder County. “If the tree is seriously damaged, it may need to be assessed to determine if it is in a dangerous condition.”

Hazard tree assessments require specifically trained experts to address this highly technical situation with potentially serious legal complications. Many city foresters and certified arborists have the training (and insurance) to perform hazard tree evaluations. Contact the local city forestry office to find a list of licensed tree services to search for those that are approved to work within the city limits. “These companies have passed tests on knowledge, safety, and current practices,” O’Meara notes. “If you live in unincorporated areas, check with the city closest to you for their list, as many companies often work over a large area.”

A word of caution, says O'Meara, "Be wary of door-knockers who stop by just after storms. Often, they don't have training or insurance, so make certain they have up- to-date proof of insurance."

Pruning off the torn branches and cleaning up wound sites is the best answer for damaged trees. If the trunk bark is torn, take a sharp knife and clean the torn bark from the tree, leaving a smooth edge to the wound. We do not recommend any wound paint - the tree will seal that area itself, and wound paint would only lock disease organisms or water into the wound.

"If people are doing their own tree cleanup, we always emphasize safety and encourage people to be cautious on ladders, or when climbing a tree," she says. "Look before you climb to see if any hazards, such as power lines, are in the way."

If it is necessary to replant, consult with your local county Extension office on appropriate replacement plants.

Whether you find that your freezer has been off due to power failure, your roof has caved in, a tree torn out of the landscape, your entire home in ruins or your crop damaged, Colorado State University Extension resources can help you pick up the pieces and restore order.

www.ext.colostate.edu.

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Colorado State University Extension in Weld County provides unbiased research-based information about consumer and family issues, horticulture, natural resources, animal and crop agriculture, and 4-H youth development. As part of a nation-wide system, Extension brings the research and resources of the University to the community. In Weld County, the Extension Office is located at Island Grove Regional Park, 525 N. 15th Avenue, Greeley. For more information, call (970) 356-4000 ext 2065, or visit the web site at: www.co.weld.co.us/departments/extension/index.html.