

Flood Clean-Up and Back Health: *Simple precautions can prevent back injuries*

Whether you have been personally affected by the flood, or are lending a helping hand as a volunteer, the work you are doing to clean-up and rebuild can be both emotionally and physically straining.

It is important to be aware of all the health risks and necessary precautions associated with flood clean up. Because many flood clean-up and rebuilding activities involve heavy and repeated lifting actions, you can be at risk of back strain or injury.

Always take these three precautions when lifting, to prevent back injuries:

- **Stop** yourself before casually picking up a light or heavy load.
- **Plan** in your mind for the best way to lift what's in front of you. This could include enlisting help from one or more people.
- **Lift and move** slowly and carefully.

Remember: the time you take to lift properly is far less than the days, weeks, or months it can take to heal from a back injury.

Take the time to follow these basic rules to protect your back while lifting:

- **Keep a wide base of support.** Your feet should be shoulder-width apart, with one foot slightly ahead of the other (karate stance).
- **Squat** down, bending at the hips and knees only. If needed, put one knee to the floor and your other knee in front of you, bent at a right angle (half kneeling).
- **Maintain good posture.** Look straight ahead, and keep your back straight, your chest out, and your shoulders back. This helps keep your upper back straight while maintaining a slight arch in your lower back.
- **Slowly lift** by straightening your hips and knees (not your back). Keep your back straight, and don't twist as you lift.
- **Hold** the load as close to your body as possible, at the level of your belly button.
- **Use your feet** to change direction, taking small steps.
- **Lead with your hips** as you change direction. Keep your shoulders in line with your hips as you move.
- **Set down** your load carefully, squatting with the knees and hips only.