

OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



Flood Disaster Response

Background

A flood is the most common hazard in the United States. It is an overflow of water that can happen during many weather conditions. Floods can develop slowly over a period of several days, or within minutes. (This is known as flash floods). When tuning into the news, you may hear the National Weather (NWS) Service mention these commonly used terms:

- A **flood WATCH** means that conditions exist where flooding is possible.
- A flash **flood WATCH** means that flooding is possible and can occur without warning.
- A **flood WARNING** means that flooding is occurring or is about to occur.
- A **flash flood WARNING** indicates that flooding is occurring.

There are several steps you can take to reduce flood risks to your family and your property.

Before a Flood

- Have an Emergency Go-Kit prepared for you and your family; make sure this contains a family communications plan.
- Avoid building in a floodprone area unless you elevate and reinforce your home.
- Elevate the furnace, water heater, and electric panel if susceptible to flooding.
- Install "check valves" in sewer traps to prevent floodwater from backing up into the drains of your home.
- Contact community officials to find out if they are planning to construct barriers (levees, beams, floodwalls) to stop floodwater from entering the homes in your area.
- Seal the walls in your basement with waterproofing compounds to avoid seepage.
- Consider Flood Insurance if you live in a flood prone area.

During a Flood

If a flood is likely in your area, you should:

- Listen to the radio or television for information.
- Be aware of flooding conditions. If there is any possibility of a flash flood, move immediately to higher ground. Do not wait for instructions to move.
- Be aware known areas that can flood quickly (streams, creeks, drainage channels and other areas known to flood suddenly).
- Turn off utilities at their main switches or valves if instructed to do so.
- Disconnect electrical appliances. Do not touch electrical equipment if you are wet or standing in water.
- Consider turning off electricity at the main breaker or fuse box.

When driving during flooded conditions, be aware that:

- Six inches of water will reach the bottom of most passenger cars causing loss of control and possible stalling.
- A foot of water will float many vehicles.
- Two feet of rushing water can carry away most vehicles including sport utility vehicles (SUV's) and pick-ups.
- If flood waters rise around your vehicle, turn-on-your headlights and emergency flashers. Abandon the car and move to higher ground if you can do so safely. (You and the car can be swept away quickly and abruptly).
- Always obey traffic signals and signage related to flooding. Never drive through barricades or low water crossings.

When walking in flooded conditions, be aware that:

- Six inches of moving water can make you fall.
- If you must walk through the water, walk where the water is not moving
- Use a stick to check firmness of the ground in front of you.

After a Flood

- Use NotifyMe and other notification systems to get updates and information regarding the flooded area.
- Listen for news reports to learn whether the community's water supply is safe to drink.
- Avoid floodwaters; water may be contaminated by oil, gasoline, or raw sewage. Water may also be electrically charged from underground or downed power lines.
- Avoid moving water; play it safe. Additional flooding or flash floods may and can occur.
- Flooding may have caused familiar places and roads to change. Floodwaters often erode roads and walkways. Be aware of areas where floodwaters have receded. Roads may have weakened and could collapse under the weight of a car.
- Stay away from downed power lines, and report them to the power company.
- Standing water may be electrically charged from underground or downed power lines.
- Return home only when authorities indicate it is safe.
- Stay out of any building that is surrounded by floodwaters.
- Use extreme caution when entering buildings; there may be hidden damage, particularly in foundations.
- Service damaged septic tanks, cesspools, pits, and leaching systems as soon as possible. Damaged sewage systems are serious health hazards.
- Clean and disinfect everything that was affected by the flood. Mud left from floodwater can contain sewage and chemicals.
- Turn off the electricity at the main breaker or fuse box, even if the power is off in your community. That way, you can decide when your home is dry enough to turn it back on.