



FEMA



Map Changes and Flood Insurance

What Property Owners Need to Know

September 2017

What is a flood map?

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) works with community leaders across the country to identify their flood hazards and talk about ways to reduce the impact of those and other hazards. The maps that show the flood hazards are officially called Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs). FIRMs are used for floodplain management, flood insurance rating, and flood insurance requirements. FIRMs generally show a community's flood zones, Base Flood Elevations (BFEs)¹, and floodplain boundaries; together they show the risk of flooding. High-risk zones, known as Special Flood Hazard Areas or SFHAs, show where floodwaters will be in a flood that has a one percent chance of happening in any given year. Moderate- to low-risk zones are where the risk of that level of flooding is less than one percent per year. No matter where you live or work, some risk of flooding exists.

Why do flood maps change?

Flood hazards change over time. How water flows and drains can change by new land use and community development or by natural forces such as changing weather, ground changes, or wildfires. Also, levees and dams may be affected by changes over time, increasing the flood risk. To better reflect the current flood risk conditions, FEMA uses the latest technology to update and issue new FIRMs nationwide to aid communities, property owners and other stakeholders in taking steps to address flood risks.

How are flood maps used?

Community officials use flood maps to help them understand and communicate the local flood risk, manage their floodplains, and require new and substantially-improved buildings to be built more safely and mitigate losses from future floods. These efforts make a safer community in which to live and work.

Mortgage lenders use them to help determine a property's flood risk and decide whether to require flood insurance as a part of a loan.

Insurance professionals use the maps to determine a property's flood risk and insurance cost.

Developers and builders use them as part of their location siting and construction decisions.

Residents and business owners use flood maps to learn about flood risk as they purchase property and investigate how best, financially and tangibly to protect their property from flooding.

How do flood maps show flood risk?

FIRMs show the different flood zones. Moderate- to low-risk areas are labeled Zone X (or Zones B and C on older maps). High-risk areas begin with the letters A or V. Areas where the risk is not known are shown with the letter D. BFEs displayed on FIRMs show the lowest height that floodwaters can be expected to reach during a major flood and that participating NFIP communities must consider in making floodplain management decisions.

How is the risk shown on the flood maps reflected in insurance premiums?

If your building is in a high-risk area—SFHA—you are likely to pay a higher flood insurance rate than someone in a moderate- to low-risk area. The exact amount you pay is based on several things, including the flood zone and elevation of the building.

In a high-risk area, your insurance rate will also depend on when your building was built compared to the date of the community's first FIRM. Some buildings built before the community's first FIRM, called pre-FIRM, are eligible for subsidized rates.

1. The base flood elevation (BFE) is the level of the water's surface during the 1 percent annual chance flood.

What if the new flood map shows that my risk has changed?

This chart shows how map changes can impact insurance rates. For rating information specific to your property, contact your insurance agent.

CHANGE IN RISK	RATE IMPACT
FROM: Moderate- to low-risk area (Zone B, C, or X) or Unknown (Zone D) TO: High-risk area (Zone A or V)	Flood insurance mandatory in SFHA. Flood insurance is required if you have a mortgage from a federally regulated or insured lender. Rating options can offer savings. Buildings newly mapped into an SFHA may be eligible for a lower rate during the first 12 months after a map change. Rates will then go up no more than 18 percent each year as part of the Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act of 2014. Buying a policy before the new FIRM goes into effect will save more money. Your insurance agent can give more information on how to save. If the building is sold, the policy can be transferred to the new owners, allowing them to keep the lower rate.
FROM: High-risk area (Zone A) TO: Higher-risk area (Zone V) OR Increase in BFE	Flood insurance is mandatory. Flood insurance is required if you have a mortgage from a federally regulated or insured lender. Grandfathering can offer savings. The NFIP grandfathering option lets policyholders who have built in compliance with the flood map in effect at the time of construction to use their previous zone or BFE to calculate their insurance rate. This could lead to large savings. A policy with a grandfathered rating can be transferred to new owners if the building is sold. In most cases your insurance agent will ask you to provide an Elevation Certificate for use in accurately rating the policy.
FROM: High-risk area (Zone A or V) TO: Moderate- to low-risk area (Zone X)	Flood insurance is optional, but recommended. The risk is lower, but there is still risk. More than 20 percent of NFIP claims come from buildings outside of SFHAs. You can save money by updating your policy. An existing policy can be changed to a lower-cost Preferred Risk Policy and you will get a refund for the price difference. Although flood insurance is no longer federally required, your mortgage lender can still require it.
No change	No change in insurance rates. This is still a good time to talk with your insurance agent to learn your specific risk and make sure you have enough flood insurance coverage.

How can I reduce my rates?

If you find you will have to pay a higher premium for flood insurance, you can take these steps to help reduce the cost:

- **Mitigate.** Lowering your property's exposure to flooding may make you eligible for lower premium rates. For example, you can fill in a basement or install flood vents in the crawlspace beneath the lowest level of your building; these actions help reduce the chance that your building's foundation will be displaced during a flood and lower your premium. When remodeling or rebuilding, you can consider elevating your entire structure. Also, something as simple as raising heating and cooling systems, water heaters, the electrical panel, and other mechanical items so that they are less likely to be damaged or destroyed in a flood may offer some premium savings. Talk to your local floodplain administrator or review FEMA's Homeowner's Guide to Retrofitting (<https://www.fema.gov/homeowners-guide-retrofitting>).
- **Encourage community action.** You can encourage your community to participate in the Community Rating Service (CRS), if it doesn't already. CRS is a voluntary incentive program that recognizes communities for implementing floodplain management practices that exceed the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) minimum requirements. In exchange for a community's proactive efforts to reduce flood risk, policyholders can receive reduced flood insurance premiums (<https://www.fema.gov/national-flood-insurance-program-community-rating-system>).
- **Apply for a Letter of Map Change (LOMC).** FIRMs are developed at a mapping scale that is useful for community officials, lenders, and insurance professionals, but not every rise in terrain can be depicted at this scale. If you think your building is imprecisely mapped as being in a high-risk area, FEMA has a process that allows property owners to request a more precise flood zone determination.
- This process includes the Letter of Map Amendment (LOMAs) and Letter of Map Revision-Fill (LOMR-Fs) options. A LOMA can be requested if a property has been mapped in a high-risk flood zone but is actually on naturally high ground. A LOMR-F is used for a property that has been elevated above the BFE by the placement of fill (<https://www.fema.gov/letter-map-change>).
- **Consider a higher deductible.** Just as with automobile or homeowners insurance, increasing your deductible—the amount you pay out of your pocket to cover a claim before coverage is applied—will lower your premium. Selecting the maximum deductible of \$10,000 will result in up to a 40 percent discount from the base premium. However, using the maximum deductible might not be appropriate in every financial circumstance, and some lenders might not allow that option for meeting the mandatory purchase requirements.

Where can I learn more?

If a mapping project is occurring in your community, stay in contact with your local floodplain administrator to learn when and where changes are occurring and to find out where you can view the new maps. When a preliminary FIRM is released, that map and the current FIRM will be available online at <https://msc.fema.gov/portal>.

To hear about ways to reduce your insurance premium—such as grandfathering, choosing a higher deductible, or mitigating the risk—ask your insurance agent or community officials to determine what may be most effective in your situation. To learn more about flood insurance, talk to your insurance agent or visit <https://www.fema.gov/nfip>.

To speak with a flood map specialist, contact the FEMA Map Information eXchange (FMIX) at **877-FEMA-MAP (877-336-2627)**.