

FLOODS AND FLASH FLOODS

Mitigation pays. It includes any activities that prevent a disaster, reduce the chance of a disaster happening, or lessen the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies. Investing in mitigation steps now such as constructing barriers (levees) and purchasing flood insurance will help reduce the amount of structural damage to your home and financial loss from building and crop damage should a flood or flash flood occur.

BEFORE

Find out if you live in a floodprone area from your local emergency management office or Red Cross chapter.

Ask whether your property is above or below the flood stage water level and learn about the history of flooding for your region.

Learn flood warning signs and your community alert signals. Request information on preparing for floods and flash floods.

If you live in a frequently flooded area, stockpile emergency building materials.

These include plywood, plastic sheeting, lumber, nails, hammer and saw, pry bar, shovels, and sandbags.

Have check valves installed in building sewer traps to prevent flood waters from backing up in sewer drains.

As a last resort, use large corks or stoppers to plug showers, tubs, or basins.

Plan and practice an evacuation route.

Contact the local emergency management office or local American Red Cross chapter for a copy of the community flood evacuation plan.

This plan should include information on the safest routes to shelters. Individuals living in flash flood areas should have several alternate routes.

Have disaster supplies on hand:

- Flashlights and extra batteries
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Non-perishable food and water
- Manual can opener
- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards
- Sturdy shoes

Develop an emergency communication plan.

In case family members are separated from one another during floods or flash floods (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), have a plan for getting back together.

Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the “family contact.” After a disaster, it’s often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.

Make sure that all family members know how to respond during and after a flood or flash flood.

Teach all family members how and when to turn off gas, electricity, and water.

Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1, police, or the fire department, and which radio station to tune to for emergency information.

Learn about the National Flood Insurance Program.

Ask your insurance agent about flood insurance. Homeowners policies do not cover flood damage.

DURING

During a flood watch:

- Listen to a battery-operated NOAA weather radio for the latest storm information.
- Fill bathtub, sinks, and jugs with clean water in case water becomes contaminated.
- Bring outdoor belongings, such as patio furniture, indoors.
- Move valuable household possessions to upper floors or to safe ground if time permits.
- If you are instructed to by local authorities, turn off all utilities at the main power switch and close the main gas valve.
- Be prepared to evacuate.

DURING

During a flood:

If indoors:

- Turn on a battery-operated radio or television to get the latest weather and emergency information.
- Get your preassembled emergency supplies ready.
- If told to leave, do so immediately.

If outdoors:

- Climb to high ground and stay there.
- Avoid walking through any floodwaters. If it is moving swiftly, water six inches deep can sweep you off your feet.

If in a car:

- If you come to a flooded area, turn around and go another way.
- If your car stalls, abandon it immediately and climb to higher ground. Many deaths have resulted from attempts to drive through high water or move stalled vehicles.

During an evacuation:

- If advised to evacuate, do so immediately.
- Evacuation is not safe when flood waters become more than six inches deep.
- Listen to a battery-operated radio for evacuation instructions.
- Follow recommended evacuation routes — shortcuts may be blocked.
- Leave early enough to avoid being marooned by flooded roads.
- Remember that 24 inches of water will carry away most vehicles.

AFTER

Flood dangers do not end when the water begins to recede.

Listen to a radio or television and don't return home until authorities indicate it is safe to do so.

Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance — infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.

Inspect foundations for cracks or other damage.

Stay out of building if flood waters remain around the building.

When entering buildings, use extreme caution:

- Wear sturdy shoes and use battery-powered lanterns or flashlights when examining buildings.
- Examine walls, floor, doors, and windows to make sure that the building is not in danger of collapsing.
- Watch out for animals, especially poisonous snakes, that may have come into your home with the flood waters. Use a stick to poke through debris.
- Watch for loose plaster and ceilings that could fall.
- Take pictures of the damage — both of the house and its contents, for insurance claims.

Look for fire hazards:

- Broken or leaking gas lines
- Flooded electrical circuits
- Submerged furnaces or electrical appliances
- Flammable or explosive materials coming from upstream

Throw away food — including canned goods — that has come in contact with flood waters.

Pump out flooded basements gradually (*about one-third of the water per day*) to avoid structural damage.

Service damaged septic tanks, cesspools, pits, and leaching systems as soon as possible. Damaged sewage systems are health hazards.

Inspecting Utilities in a Damaged Home

Check for gas leaks —

If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.

Look for electrical system damage—

If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell burning insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice.

Check for sewage and water lines damage —

If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid using water from the tap. You can obtain safe water by melting ice cubes.