



Disaster Facts – Floods and Flash Floods

Flash floods occur within a few minutes or hours of excessive rainfall, a dam or levee failure, or a sudden release of water held by an ice jam. Flash floods can roll boulders, tear out trees, destroy buildings and bridges, and scour out new channels. Rapidly rising water can reach heights of 30 feet or more. Flash flood-producing rains can also trigger catastrophic mudslides. You will not always have a warning that these deadly, sudden floods are coming. **Most flood deaths are due to flash floods.**

Floods claim an average of 263 lives every year. Flood waters only one foot deep can sweep you off your feet and a depth of 2 feet will float your car. Never try to walk, swim, or drive through such swift water. **If you come upon floodwaters, stop! Turn around and go another way.**

Officials will forecast flood(s) when the rainfall is heavy enough to cause rivers to overflow their banks.

Property damage and/or loss due to flood is not covered by regular homeowners' insurance policies. Flood insurance is available through the government's **National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)**. Your insurance agent should have further information about how to insure your property against flood damage, or call the NFIP at 1.800.427.4661.

Do not stack sandbags directly against the outside walls of a building. Pressure against the foundation can cause severe damage. Stack sandbags away from building walls to prevent floodwaters from reaching your home or business.

To avoid structural damage to the foundation of your home if you have a basement, some experts recommend permitting flood waters to flow into the basement or to flood the basement yourself if you are sure it will be flooded anyway. This equalizes the water pressure on the outside of the walls. Basements should be pumped out gradually (about one-third of the water per day) to avoid damage. The walls may collapse and the floor may buckle if the basement is pumped out while the surrounding ground is still waterlogged.

Be careful of electrical and gas utilities. Have experts inspect and reconnect utilities after a flood.

Check with local civil defense or emergency management authorities before using any water after a flood. **Water sources may have been contaminated.**

Hidden Dangers of Areas Flooded by Storm

Do not walk through flowing water - Drowning is a major cause of flood deaths. Use a pole or stick to make sure the ground continues in front of you.

Do not drive through a flooded area - If you come upon a road barrier, turn around and go the other way; the road or bridge may be washed out.

Stay away from power lines and electrical wires - Electrocutation is also a major killer in floods. Electrical current can travel through water. Report downed power lines.

Turn off your electricity when you return home - Some appliances, such as TV sets, can shock you even after they have been unplugged. Don't use appliances or motors that have gotten wet unless they have been taken apart, cleaned and dried by a professional.

Watch for animals – especially snakes - Small animals that have been flooded out of their homes may seek shelter in yours. Use a stick to poke and turn items over and scare away small animals.

Look before you step - After a flood, the ground and floors are covered with debris, including broken bottles and nails, and may be slippery.

Be alert for gas leaks - Use a flashlight to inspect for damage. Don't smoke or use candles, lanterns, or open flames unless you are sure that the gas has been turned off and the area aired out.

Carbon monoxide exhaust kills - Use generators, gas powered machines, and camping stoves outdoors. Cook with charcoal outdoors only.

Clean everything that got wet - Floodwaters have picked up sewage and chemicals from roads, farms, factories and storage buildings. Spoiled food and flooded cosmetics and medicine are health hazards. When in doubt, throw them out.