

Flash Flood Safety Tips

According to the National Weather Service, flash flooding is the number one cause of deaths associated with thunderstorms, killing more than 140 people per year.

A flash flood is a rapid rise of water along a stream or low-lying urban area. Flash floods can be produced when slow moving or multiple thunderstorms occur over the same area. When storms move faster, flash flooding is less likely since the rain is distributed over a broader area. The melting of winter snow can also cause flooding. Floods can roll boulders the size of cars, tear out trees and destroy buildings and bridges. Read more to learn what you can do to reduce your risks of injury during a flash flood.

Before a Flood

A flood watch is issued when flooding is possible within the watch area. When a flood watch is issued, you should be aware of potential flood hazards. Everyone in a watch area should be ready to respond and act quickly. Use the following tips to help prepare yourself and your family for a flood watch:

- Have a plan in place before flooding occurs, and make sure everyone in your family understands how to implement this plan. Discussing flood plans ahead of time helps reduce fear and anxiety and lets everyone know how to respond.
- Know your level of flood risk, and include any necessary evacuation procedures in your flood plan. You will want to determine whether the roads you normally travel to reach your home or job will be flooded during a storm, and identify alternative routes to use during flooding.
- Keep a NOAA Weather Radio, a battery-powered portable radio, emergency cooking equipment and flashlights in working order. Make sure that everyone in your family knows where these items are located.
- Have a professional install check-valves in plumbing to prevent flood waters from backing up into the drains of your home.
- Stock enough nonperishable food and clean water to last everyone in your household 72 hours. You should also make sure your vehicle has enough gas and is stocked with supplies, such as blankets, a first-aid kit and dry clothing.

During a Flood

Use the following safety tips if a flood warning is issued for your area:

- If advised to evacuate, do so immediately! Families should use only one vehicle to avoid getting separated and reduce traffic jams. Move to a safe area before access is cut off by flood water. Continue listening to NOAA Weather Radio, radio or television for information concerning the flooding.
- Only drive if absolutely necessary, since only two feet of water on a bridge or highway can float most vehicles. Almost half of all flash flood fatalities occur in vehicles. If the vehicle stalls, leave it immediately and move to higher ground.
- Do not attempt to cross flowing streams where the water level is above your ankles. Climb to higher ground. If it is moving swiftly, even water six inches deep can knock you off your feet. Many people are swept away wading through flood waters, resulting in injury or death.
- Do not drive through a flooded road. The depth of water is not always obvious. The road bed may be washed out under the water, and you could be stranded or trapped.
- Never try to walk, swim, drive or play in flood water. You may not be able to see how fast the flood water is moving or see holes or submerged debris.
- Do not camp or park your vehicle along streams and washes, particularly during threatening conditions.
- Be especially cautious at night when it is harder to recognize flood dangers.
- Do not drive around a barricade. Barricades are there for your protection. Turn around and go another way.

After the Flood

Once the immediate danger of a flood has passed, you will still need to exercise caution to avoid injury or further property damage. Use the following safety tips once the flood is over:

- Get necessary medical care at the nearest hospital.
- Do not visit disaster areas. Your presence might hamper rescue and other emergency operations.
- If the power is out, use flashlights, not candles, lanterns, torches or matches to examine buildings. Flammables or natural gas may be inside.
- Report broken utility lines to appropriate authorities.
- Boil drinking water vigorously for 10 minutes before using. Wells should be pumped out and the water tested for purity before drinking. If fresh or canned food has come in contact with flood waters, throw it out.
- Open all the doors, windows, closets and vents throughout your house. Place fans in the open windows and doorways. The more the air in your house is circulating, the faster things will dry.
- Try to keep your home's temperature about 15 degrees higher than it is outside. Be sure to check your heating system before turning it on to make sure flood water did not damage it.
- To dry the areas between walls, remove the baseboards and drill or punch holes in the walls about two inches from the floor.
- Remove as much water as possible from carpets and rugs with a water vacuum, and use fans to facilitate drying.

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