

Flood FAQ

Q. 1) What is a flood?

A flood results from days of heavy rain and/or melting snows, when rivers rise and go over their banks.

Q.2) What is a flash flood?

A flash flood is sudden flooding that occurs when floodwaters rise rapidly with no warning within several hours of an intense rain. They often occur after intense rainfall from slow moving thunderstorms. In narrow canyons and valleys, floodwaters flow faster than on flatter ground and can be quite destructive.

Q. 3) What causes floods?

Flooding occurs in known floodplains when prolonged rainfall over several days, intense rainfall over a short period of time, or a debris jam causes a river or stream to overflow and flood the surrounding area. Severe thunderstorms can bring heavy rain in the spring and summer; or tropical cyclones can bring intense rainfall to the coastal and inland states in the summer and fall.

Q. 4) Is flooding really that big of a deal?

Floods are a dangerous hazard throughout the world. Most people underestimate the power and destructiveness of flood waters. The force of six inches of swiftly moving water can knock people off their feet. Flash flood waters move at very fast speeds and can roll boulders, tear out trees, destroy buildings, and obliterate bridges. Walls of water can reach heights of 10 to 20 feet and generally are accompanied by a deadly cargo of debris. Cars can be easily swept away in just 2 feet of moving water.

Q. 5) Are there different types of flooding?

There are two basic kinds of floods, flash floods and the more widespread river flooding. Flash floods generally cause greater loss of life and river floods generally cause greater loss of property. A flash flood occurs when runoff from excessive rainfall causes a rapid rise in the stage of a stream or normally dry channel. Flash floods are more common in areas with a dry climate and rocky terrain because lack of soil or vegetation allows torrential rains to flow overland rather than infiltrate into the ground.

River flooding is generally more common for larger rivers in areas with a wetter climate, when excessive runoff from longer-lasting rainstorms and sometimes from melting snow causes a slower water-level rise, but over a larger area. Floods also can be caused by ice jams on a river, or high tides. However, most floods can be linked to a storm of some kind.

Q.6) How are floods predicted?

Several types of data can be collected to assist hydrologists predict when and where floods might occur:

- Monitoring the amount of rainfall occurring on a realtime basis
- Monitoring the rate of change in river stage on a realtime basis, which can help indicate the severity and immediacy of the threat
- Knowledge about the type of storm producing the moisture, such as duration, intensity and areal extent, which can be valuable for determining possible severity of the flooding
- Knowledge about the characteristics of a river's drainage basin, such as soil-moisture conditions, ground temperature, snowpack, topography, vegetation cover, and impermeable land area, which can help to predict how extensive and damaging a flood might become

Q.7) What should I do in preparation for a flood?

Make an itemized list of personal property well in advance of a flood occurring. Photograph the interior and exterior of your home. Store the list, photos and documents in a safe place. Memorize the safest and fastest route to high ground. Assemble a disaster supplies kit containing: first aid kit, canned food and can opener, bottled water, extra clothing, rubber boots and gloves, battery-operated radio, emergency cooking equipment, flashlight and extra batteries. If you live in a frequently flooded area, keep sandbags, plastic sheets and lumber on hand to protect property. Install check valves in building sewer traps to prevent flood water from backing up into the drains of your home. Know the elevation of your property in relation to nearby streams and other waterways, and plan what you will do and where you will go in a flood emergency.

Q.8) What should I do when a flood threatens?

If forced to leave your property and time permits, move essential items to safe ground, fill tanks to keep them from floating away and grease immovable machinery. Store a supply of drinking water in clean bathtubs and in large containers. Get out of areas subject to flooding. This includes dips, low spots, floodplains, etc.

Next FAQ Set >>
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