

Flood Awareness

New York State Office of Emergency Management



FLOOD FACT SHEET

FLOOD AWARENESS WEEK: March 14-18, 2011

Spring's arrival in New York State is always a welcome sight to those who have braved months of this past winter's harsh conditions with its chilling winds, blowing snows and frosty ice. However, it is important to remember that this is also the time of year when flooding can occur quickly and without much warning. Spring rains and winter snow and ice thaws can cause flooding and affect homes, property and, most importantly, New Yorkers' safety.

The New York State Office of Emergency Management (NYS OEM) joins the National Weather Service offices serving New York State in observance of Flood Awareness Week, March 14-18, 2011. Use the tips below and on NYS OEM's website (www.semo.state.ny.us) to learn what to do before flooding occurs, how to stay safe during such an event, and where to find help when you need it.

TERMS TO KNOW

Flood or Flash Flood Watch

Indicates that flooding or flash flooding will occur within a few hours of heavy rainfall, a dam or levee failure, or water is being released from an ice jam.

Flood or Flash Flood Warning

Inundation of a normally dry area near a stream or other watercourse, or unusually severe ponding of water has been reported or is imminent.

BE PREPARED!

- Learn the safest route from your home or business to high, safe ground should you have to leave in a hurry.
- Develop an emergency plan and identify a meeting place if family members become separated. Know what to do and when to do it.
- Make an itemized list of all valuables including furnishings, clothing, and other personal property. If possible, take photos of your items. Keep the list in a safe place.
- Plan what to do with your pets.
- Keep your automobile fueled. If electric power is cut off, gasoline stations may not be able to pump fuel for several days. Have a small kit of disaster supplies in the trunk of your car.
- Find out how many feet your property is above and below possible flood levels. When predicted flood levels are broadcast, you can determine if you may be flooded.
- Have emergency waterproofing supplies on hand, including sandbags, plywood, plastic sheeting, and lumber.

BEFORE THE FLOOD

- Stay informed! Monitor the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Weather Radio or your local radio and TV station broadcasts for information. Subscribe to NY-ALERT (www.nyalert.gov) to receive the latest information for your location.
- If local officials advise evacuation, do so promptly.
- If directed to a specific location, go there.
- Know where the shelters are located.
- If there is time, move essential items and furniture to the upper floors of the house. Disconnect electrical appliances that cannot be moved. Do not touch them if you are wet or standing in water.
- If you are told to shut off water, gas, or electrical services before leaving your home, then do so.
- Secure your home: lock all doors and windows.

TRAVEL WITH CARE

- Leave early to avoid being marooned on flooded roads. Follow recommended routes. Do not sightsee.
- As you travel, monitor local radio broadcasts for the latest information.
- Watch for washed-out roads, earthslides, broken water or sewer mains, loose or downed electrical wires, and falling or fallen objects.
- Watch for areas where rivers or streams may suddenly rise and flood, such as highway dips, bridges, and low areas.
- Do not attempt to drive over a flooded road. Turn around and go another way.
- If you are in your car and water begins to rise rapidly around you, abandon the vehicle immediately.

THE HIDDEN DANGER - LOW-WATER CROSSING

- Nearly half of all flash flood fatalities are vehicle related! When driving your automobile during flood conditions, look out for flooding at highway dips, bridges and low areas.
- Even the largest and heaviest of vehicles will float. Water moving at two miles per hour can sweep cars off a road or bridge.
- As little as six inches of water may cause you to lose control of your vehicle. Do not drive through flowing water!
- A hidden danger awaits motorists where a road without a bridge dips across a creek bed.
- Motorists develop false confidence when they normally or frequently pass through a dry low-water crossing.
- Road beds may have been scoured or even washed away during flooding creating unsafe driving conditions.
- Those who repeatedly drive through flooded low-water crossings may not recognize the dangers of a small increase in the water level.
- Driving too fast through low water will cause the vehicle to hydroplane and lose contact with the road surface.
- Visibility is limited at night increasing the vulnerability of the driver to any hidden dangers.
- Heed all flood and flash flood watches and warnings.
- Remain aware of road conditions!



AFTER THE FLOOD

- Stay informed! Listen to the radio or TV or bulletins from NY-ALERT for instructions from local officials. And heed them.
- Wait until an area has been declared safe before entering it. Be careful driving, since roads may be damaged and power lines may be down.
- Before entering a building, check for structural damage. Turn off any outside gas lines at the meter or tank. Let the building air out to remove foul odors or escaping gas. Upon entering the building, use a battery-powered flashlight. Do not use an open flame as a source of light. Gas may be trapped inside.
- When inspecting the building, wear rubber boots and gloves. Watch for electrical shorts and live wires before making certain the main power switch is off.
- Do not turn on electrical appliances until an electrician has checked the system and appliances.
- Throw out any medicine or food that has had contact with floodwaters. Test drinking water for potability. Wells should be pumped out and water tested for drinking.
- If the public water system is declared “unsafe” by health officials, water for drinking and cooking should be boiled vigorously for 10 minutes.

Preventing Illness: Sanitation and Hygiene

- Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected before eating and after toilet use, cleanup activities or handling items contaminated by floodwater or sewage.
- Flood waters may contain fecal matter from sewage systems, agricultural and industrial waste and septic tanks. If you have open cuts or sores exposed to the floodwater, keep them as clean as possible by washing them with soap and disinfected or boiled water. Apply antibiotic ointment to reduce the risk of infection.
- Do not allow children to play in floodwater or with toys that are contaminated by floodwater.
- If floodwaters are covering your septic tank and leach field you should not use any flush toilets attached to the system.

Preventing Mold Growth

- Moisture that enters buildings from leaks or flooding accelerates mold growth. Molds can cause disease, trigger allergic reactions and continue to damage materials after the storm.
- Remove standing water from your home or office. Remove wet materials promptly and ventilate; use fans and dehumidifiers if possible.
- If mold growth has already occurred, it is best to have a professional remove it.
- Individuals with known mold allergies or asthma should never clean or remove mold.
- Be careful about mixing household cleaners and disinfectants, as combining certain types of products can produce toxic fumes and result in injury or death.

Additional Household Cleanup

- Walls, hard-surfaced floors and many other household surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water and disinfected with a solution of 1 cup of bleach to five gallons of water.
- Thoroughly disinfect surfaces that come in contact with food and children’s play areas.
- Wash all linens and clothing in hot water or dry-clean.
- Items that cannot be washed or dry-cleaned, such as mattresses and upholstered furniture, must be air dried in the sun and sprayed thoroughly with a disinfectant.
- Steam-clean all carpeting.
- Replace fiberboard, insulation and disposable filters in your heating/cooling system.
- Wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during clean-up.
- It can be difficult to throw away items in a home, particularly those with sentimental value. However, keeping certain items soaked by sewage or floodwaters may be unhealthy. Materials that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried within 24-48 hours should be discarded.

Household Supplies & Equipment

- One gallon liquid chlorine bleach
- Battery-powered radio or television
- Flashlights
- Extra, fresh batteries for radio, television and flashlights
- Manual can opener
- Plastic bags – zip sealing, garbage
- Fire extinguisher (small canister A-B-C type)
- Food thermometer – able to measure temperature from 0 to 200 degrees Fahrenheit

Tools

- Rope
- Shovel
- Hammer and nails
- Utility knife
- Work gloves
- Duct tape
- Electrical tape
- Clean-up supplies
- Broom
- Buckets
- Dust masks
- Disinfecting spray
- Mop
- Paper towels
- Rags (to clean with)
- Rubber gloves
- Scrub brush
- Sponges
- Trash bags

EMERGENCY PLAN

- Meet with your family members and discuss the dangers of possible emergency events including fire, flood, severe weather, hazardous spills, and terrorism.
- Discuss how you and your family will respond to each possible emergency. Know how to contact all family members at all times. Think 24/7 and 365.
- Draw a floor plan of your home. If possible, mark two escape routes from each room.
- Select two places to meet: a spot outside your home for an emergency such as fire, and a place away from your neighborhood in case you cannot return home (a real possibility during the day when most adults are at work and children are at school).
- Identify an out-of-town friend or relative as your “emergency family check-in contact” for everyone to call if the family gets separated. Make sure all family members have the correct phone number. It is often easier to call out-of-town during an emergency than within the affected area.
- Post emergency contact numbers near all telephones. Include local police, fire and health departments, poison control, your children’s schools, doctors, child/senior care providers and insurance agents.
- Have your family learn basic safety and first aid measures.
- Keep family records in a waterproof and fireproof safe.
- Have emergency supplies on hand.
- Teach adults how to turn off the water, gas and electricity at main switches. If, for any reason, you do turn off natural gas service to your home, call your natural gas utility to restore service. DO NOT attempt to restore gas service yourself.
- Make arrangements for your pets. Most shelters do not allow pets. Prior to an emergency, contact your county or local emergency management office and ask them where you could leave your pet. Have identification, leash and proof of vaccination for all pets. Have current photos of your pets in case they get lost.
- Practice the plan!

**For additional tips on how to be prepared for all hazards,
visit the NYS Office of Emergency Management on the web at**

www.semo.state.ny.us