

Flood Preparedness and Response

STRATEGIES FOR FAMILIES

Floods are an inevitable and natural part of life in Wisconsin, especially for those who live along streams and rivers. Counties that border the Mississippi and the Wisconsin rivers are the most flood prone, but serious floods have occurred throughout the state. It is important to be prepared and know what to do before disaster strikes.

BE PREPARED

- ◆ *Find out if you live in a flood prone area.* If you are new to the area, ask your local public works or emergency government office about local flood history. Ask whether your property is above or below the flood stage water level.
- ◆ *If you live in a frequently flooded area, stockpile emergency building materials.* These include plywood, plastic sheeting, lumber, nails, hammer, saw, pry bar, shovels and sandbags.
- ◆ *Plan and practice an evacuation route.* Contact your local emergency government 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 to higher ground.
- ◆ *Have emergency supplies on hand.*
 - a) Flashlights and extra batteries
 - b) Portable battery-operated radio and extra batteries
 - c) First-aid kit and manual; essential medicines
 - d) Emergency food, water, cooking equipment, can opener
 - e) Cash and credit cards
- ◆ *Develop an emergency communication plan.* In case family members are separated during a disaster because of work or school, choose a long-distance relative or friend who can serve as the “family contact.” After a disaster, it is often easier to call long-distance than to place a local call. 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 after a flood or flash flood.* Teach family members how to turn off gas, electricity and water; local authorities may request that you do so during a flood. Teach children how and when to call 911, police and fire, and which radio station to tune to for emergency information.
- ◆ *Keep the car fueled.* Stations may not be able to operate because of lack of electricity.
- ◆ *Learn about the National Flood Insurance Program.* Most Wisconsin communities participate in this program, which offers residents flood insurance. (See the fact sheet “Insurance Coverage and Making a Claim.”) Regular homeowner's insurance does not cover flood damage.

AFTER A FLOOD

Don't return home until authorities have indicated it is safe. When entering buildings, use extreme caution. Potential hazards include:

◆ **Gas leaks.** Leave your home immediately and call the gas company if you smell the putrid odor of leaking gas. Lanterns, torches, electrical sparks and cigarettes could cause an explosive fire if there is a leak. Do not turn on any light switches.

◆ **Electrocution.** Wear rubber gloves and rubber-soled shoes to avoid electrocution. Do not turn on any lights or appliances if the house has been flooded. Turn off the electricity when checking electrical circuits and equipment or when checking a flooded basement.

◆ **Structural damage.** Watch for falling debris and the possibility of collapsing ceilings and basement walls.

◆ **Food and water.** Do not use water or eat food that has come in contact with floodwaters.

Additional resources:

Your local emergency government office, the American Red Cross, your county Extension office, the Wisconsin Division of Emergency Government, the Federal Emergency Management Agency

Related publications:

"Flood Awareness," Wisconsin Division of Emergency Government, 1991.

DURING A FLOOD

- ◆ *Listen to the radio for further information.*
- ◆ *Fill bathtubs, sinks and jugs with clean water in case water becomes contaminated.*
- ◆ *Bring outdoor belongings, such as patio furniture, indoors.*
- ◆ *Move valuable household possessions to the upper floors or to safe ground if time permits.*
- ◆ *If you are instructed by authorities, turn off all utilities at the main power switch and close the main gas valve.*
- ◆ *Join with neighbors and volunteers to put sandbags or other protection in place. Stack sandbags away from the outside walls of houses to prevent floodwaters from entering.*
- ◆ *Do not attempt to walk through moving floodwaters. If they are moving fast enough, water one foot deep can sweep you off your feet.*
- ◆ *Do not attempt to drive over a flooded road. Turn around and go another way.*

DURING AN EVACUATION

- ◆ *Listen to the radio for evacuation instructions. If advised to evacuate, do so immediately. Evacuation is much simpler and safer before floodwaters become too deep for ordinary vehicles to drive through.*
- ◆ *Follow recommended evacuation routes — shortcuts may be blocked.*