



Vison & Action

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About to be Flooded?

The following Q&A is adapted from the UK's National Flood Forum.

If you or your neighbors are in danger from rising waters, please obey government evacuation orders or contact your local first responders at 911.

If you are in no danger but anticipate flooding, this factsheet offers some practical suggestions on how to protect yourself and your property before, during and after the event.

Before the event

If there's a risk of severe flooding in your area, you need to prepare your property. Make sure that drainage gates and catch basins are clear from debris and leaves, clear your gutters and if you have a sump pump, make sure that it is working.

If you have access to sandbags, position them so that they block water entering your property through doorways, drains and other openings. You can also use them to weigh-down drain covers and garden furniture, and to block-up sink, toilet and bath drains to prevent water backing up. Sandbags can only keep water out for short periods. Their effectiveness can be improved however by using them in conjunction with plastic sheeting. If you can't get sandbags, trash bags filled with garden soil can also work. You'll need at least 6 sandbags to keep out 20cm depth of water for a standard door opening. Each sandbag will need approximately 30lb of sand.

If you live in a multi-story house, and think water might enter your ground floor, move your valuable belongings to the upper floors. Bring inside lawn furniture, grills, trash cans and similar items, or else tie them down securely. Charge your cell phone, put fresh batteries in your flashlights, and make sure you have adequate food and water for a few days in case you are stranded in your house. You should fill your bathtubs, sinks, and plastic soda bottles with clean water, but first sanitize the sinks and tubs by cleaning with bleach and thoroughly rinsing them.

If water enters your property

If floodwater enters your property, call your town or city. Even if they can't come out to your property, it is still important that they have a record of your flooding incident. You may be evacuated to a temporary emergency center or you may choose to go to family or friends. Always follow emergency service guidance.

If you are in your home during a flood, the following advice will prove helpful:

Carefully turn off your main electrical switch while standing on a dry, non-conductive surface such as heavy rubber, plastic, or dry wood. Also be alert for gas leaks. If the water rises high enough to extinguish the pilot light on your water heater or furnace, it may be letting gas into the property. Turn off the gas supply to these units. Do not use candles, lanterns, or open flames in the area, and do not smoke until you are absolutely certain that leaking gas is not an issue.

If the waters start to rise inside your house, retreat to the second floor, the attic, or, if necessary, the roof. Take dry clothing, cell phone, flashlights, and a portable radio with you. Don't try to swim to safety. Instead, wait for rescuers to come to you.

If you decide to leave your property, avoid walking through flooded areas. As little as six inches of moving water can knock you off your feet. Shallow standing water can be dangerous for small children. If you have to enter floodwater, move slowly and carefully, make sure you are wearing strong sensible shoes and use a stick to check that your path is clear.

Do not rely on your car to protect you from floodwaters. If you come upon a flooded road, turn around and go another way. More people drown in their cars than anywhere else. If driving in floods is unavoidable, do so with extreme caution. Just 6 inches depth of fast flowing water can sweep an SUV off a road. Since electric currents pass easily through water, electrocution is another major cause of death during floods, so avoid downed power lines and electrical wires.

After the flood

Wait for water to drain out of the property before reentering. When you do enter, do not strike matches, or use cigarette lighters or any other open flames, since gas may still be trapped inside. Instead, use a flashlight to find your way.

Floodwater may be contaminated, especially by untreated sewage. Contamination remains after the floodwater has gone and can be hazardous unless simple procedures are followed:

- Wear rubber boots and gloves in and around the affected property.
- Wash all cuts with soap and bandage if necessary. Anyone receiving a cut or scrape should seek advice from their doctor.

- Small children, pregnant women and people with health problems should avoid floodwater and flooded areas until clean-up is complete.

Floodwater can damage buildings severely, particularly if it has been flowing quickly, is over 1 yard deep, or has been in a property for a long time. Be careful when moving any debris that may have been carried onto your property or the surrounding area. Avoid heavy objects (e.g. trees) that may be unstable and could suddenly move and trap or crush you. Standing water and mud can hide holes, damage to structures and sharp objects.

Keep the electricity supply to the property turned off until a qualified electrician or utility company has checked out the electrics. Use extreme caution. Ensure that all switches, sockets and appliances are checked prior to use, especially if they have been in contact with floodwater. Once all electrical safety checks have been made, make sure that you use a circuit breaker with any electrical equipment that you may use to clean, or repair your property.

If your home, apartment, or business has suffered severe damage, immediately call the insurance company or agent who handles your flood insurance policy to file a claim. If you are not insured, make a written record of the date and time the flooding started and ended, and note the depth of the water. It is critical that you photograph and document the height of the water and any damage to items and the value of these items. This information will help you make a case for compensation and future flood protection from government agencies.

If damage is severe, consider a professional cleaning service. If you are cleaning the property yourself, wear appropriate protection, such as rubber boots and gloves. Make sure to disinfect any affected areas with a solution of water and bleach (four tablespoons of bleach per gallon of water), and always save receipts for out-of-pocket expenses on clean-ups.