

**ESP**

**FOCUS**

## Floods



### Don't get swept off your feet!

Floods are one of the most common hazards in the United States. They can cause deaths, injuries, significant property damage, and also contaminate drinking water and disrupt electrical service. These effects can be local, impacting a neighborhood or community, or regional, affecting entire river basins and multiple states.

All floods are not alike. Some floods develop slowly, sometimes over a period of days. Flash floods can develop quickly, sometimes in just a few minutes and without any visible signs of rain. Flash floods often have a dangerous wall

of roaring water that carries rocks, mud, and other debris and can sweep away most things in its path. Overland flooding occurs outside a defined river or stream, such as when a levee is breached, but still can be destructive. Flooding can also occur when a dam breaks, producing effects similar to flash floods.

Be aware of flood hazards no matter where you live, but especially if you live in a low-lying area, near water or downstream from a dam. Even very small streams, gullies, dry streambeds, or low-lying ground that appear harmless in dry weather can flood. Be very cautious when near or crossing streams, rivers, flood control channels and flooded intersections. Every state is at risk from this hazard.

Use this information and the recommendations on the reverse side of this Focus Sheet to help reduce your risk of death, injury, and property losses from flooding wherever you live, work, or play.

### Check these websites

[www.espfocus.org](http://www.espfocus.org) (Emergency Survival Program)

[www.calema.ca.gov](http://www.calema.ca.gov) (California Emergency Management Agency)



**APRIL**

[www.espfocus.org](http://www.espfocus.org)

## Before the Flood Warning or Watch

Be prepared to respond to flooding by taking the following actions before the rains and flooding begin:

- Assemble emergency supply kits for your home, workplace, and vehicle.
- Store a seven-day supply of food and water (at least one gallon per person, per day) in closed, clean containers.
- Store the following materials for protecting your home in a location away from potential flooding:
  - Sandbags
  - Plastic sheeting
  - Plywood
  - Lumber
- Teach children not to play in or near rivers, streams, or other areas of potential flooding.
- Maintain fuel in your cars; electrical outages might make gasoline pumps inoperable.
- Identify safe routes from your home or work place to high, safe ground. Determine whether you can use these routes during flooding or storms. Be familiar with your geographic surroundings.
- Check with your local public works, building or planning department to see if you live in an area subject to flooding.
- Clear debris and overgrowth from gutters and storm drains.
- Notify your local department of public works about debris and overgrowth in public drainage facilities.
- Work with neighbors to solve potential drainage problems and to avoid diverting debris onto their properties. Consult a licensed civil engineer if you're in doubt.
- Identify an out-of-state contact so that friends and relatives can obtain information about your condition and whereabouts.

## When There's a Flood Warning or Watch

- Relocate valuables from lower to upper floors.
- Be prepared to move to a safe area, before flood waters cut off access, when local authorities advise.
- Disconnect all electrical appliances or turn off electric circuits at the fuse panel or circuit breaker panel before evacuating.

## During the Flood

- Avoid unnecessary trips.
- Do not drive or walk through moving water. You can be knocked off your feet in as little as 6 inches of water.
- Do not "sightsee" or enter restricted areas.
- Stay away from streams, rivers, flood control channels and other areas subject to sudden flooding.
- Move to higher ground if you're caught by rising waters.
- Listen to the radio or watch television for information and instructions.
- Use the phone only to report dangerous conditions or emergencies that are life threatening. Report damaged utilities to the appropriate agencies.

## After the Flood

- Listen to the radio or watch television for information and instructions from local officials.
- Call your utility companies to restore service.
- Do not use fresh or canned foods that have come in contact with flood waters.
- Follow the instructions of local officials regarding the safety of drinking water. Boil or purify water if you're in doubt. Pump out wells and test the water before drinking.
- Avoid going into disaster areas.
- Stay away from live electrical equipment in wet areas. Check electrical equipment or appliances that come in contact with water before using them.
- Maintain a safe distance from downed power lines and broken gas lines; immediately report them to the appropriate utility.
- Use flashlights, rather than lanterns, candles or matches, to check on the condition of buildings. Flammables may be present.

## Flood Insurance

Damage and other flooding losses are not covered by most homeowner's insurance policies. However, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers special flood insurance through its National Flood Insurance Program. Contact your insurance agent or call FEMA at (800) 638-6620 or visit [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) for more information.

*Extracted and adapted from "Be Winter Wise," published by the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, "Be Flood Aware," published by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, and FEMA's Flood website ([www.fema.gov/hazard/flood](http://www.fema.gov/hazard/flood)).Headline*

### HEALTH TIP: Avoid floodwaters.

Keep contact time with floodwaters to a minimum. Keep all children and pets out of the floodwaters when possible. The water may be contaminated by oil, gasoline or raw sewage. It is especially important to keep the water out of your mouth, eyes, and nose. Wash your hands frequently with soap and clean water if you are exposed to floodwaters.

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