

# Floods

Floods are one of the most expensive natural disasters in the United States, costing the country billions of dollars every year in damage. Because a flood can happen anywhere it rains, it is important for everybody to know what causes floods, how to prevent floods, and how to stay safe in case of a flood.



## What is a Flood?

A flood occurs whenever water overflows onto land that is usually dry. This can happen for a variety of reasons including:

- A large amount of rain in a short time
- Overflowing rivers or streams
- A large storm near the coast that causes huge waves
- Melting snow or ice
- A dam or levee breaking

## Preventing Floods

Although humans can't stop the rain from pouring, there are steps we can take to make sure flood damage isn't deadly or costly. For example, many areas that are prone to flooding build **levees**. A levee is a type of wall that keeps water from going where you don't want it to go. Some levees develop naturally, but many are manmade. Usually they are built by piling sand, soil, and rocks together to create a wall. In areas that flood often, a levee might be built from concrete. Sometimes, people create a temporary levee by making a wall out of stacks of sandbags.



A temporary wall of sandbags to prevent flooding

There are other steps that can be taken to prevent floods. Planting a lot of trees and bushes in your yard can help slow flooding. This helps because it gives rain a place to go – the water can be absorbed through the soil and the roots of plants. Also, most cities have rules about where buildings and structures can be built, so that waterways are not blocked.

**It only takes 6 inches of strong flood water to knock a person down.**

**Floods can occur EVERYWHERE – even in the desert!**

**Did You Know?**

**Floods have occurred in all 50 states in America.**

**It only takes 2 feet of flood water to carry a car away.**

### **Flood Safety**

Although floods can occur anywhere, there are some areas that are more prone to flooding. Since water moves naturally from higher ground to lower ground, areas that are on lower ground are much more likely to flood. Also, low areas next to rivers, lakes, or the ocean have a greater risk for

floods. Avoiding living in areas like this can reduce your risk for flooding.

It usually takes hours – sometimes even days – for water to build up and flood, so often there is plenty of time to evacuate safely. However, sometimes a flood can occur quickly and without warning. This is called a flash flood, and it is the most dangerous type of flooding.

Before a flood occurs, there are several things you can do to keep yourself and your property safe. First, if there is time, place items that are important to you up high where hopefully the floodwaters will not be able to reach. Also, put chemicals and medicines up high. This helps to prevent the flood water from being contaminated by hazardous chemicals.

Be prepared to evacuate as soon as you are told. Once it starts to flood, driving in the water can be very dangerous and should be avoided at all costs.