

## Flathead County: Flood Information

### What to do before the flood

- Find out if you live or work in a flood-prone area. If you are new to the area, talk to neighbors or call (406) 758-5980, Flood Plain Office in Flathead County. You may also check the Flathead River Flood Warning Map. Remember -- the next flood could be larger than the previous flood.
- Set up a neighborhood notification network that can be activated when a flood warning has been issued. Give special attention to contacting and helping the elderly and the handicapped during a flood emergency. Keep the network up-to-date.
- Learn the safest route from your home, farm or business to high, safe ground. Be aware of low-lying areas which flood early and cut off escape routes.
- In case of evacuation, make prior arrangements for temporary housing in a non-flood area. Emergency shelters will be established during a large flood. All evacuees must register at a designated emergency shelter (to be provided during flood warning) whether they will be staying at a shelter or not.
- Establish a safe family rendezvous location in case of separation during a flood.
- Obtain a first aid kit and learn how to use it. In addition, take CPR training or find out which close neighbor knows CPR. (Injury and heart attacks increase during a major flood).
- Keep a portable radio, fresh batteries, flashlights, rain gear, warm clothing, medicines, non-perishable food that requires little preparation, and drinking water in containers on hand. Remember, electric power will probably be interrupted during a flood.
- Consider having a rowboat available in case you need to evacuate by boat -- include life jackets.
- Consider buying flood insurance from an insurance carrier. (Home owners insurance does not normally cover flood losses.)

- Consider the possibility of elevating your home above the elevation of the 100-year flood, or flood-proofing your commercial structure.
- Learn how to minimize future flood damages. Discuss the following measures (and others) with family members and coworkers.
  - Store valuables at higher elevations (second floor if possible).
  - Store household chemicals, fuels, cleaning agents, paints, insecticides, and other toxic materials above flood levels.
  - Ensure that underground/surface storage tanks are sealed and secure from flood damage.
  - Learn where to safely park your vehicle or equipment so that it does not get flooded.
  - Know how to turn off utilities (gas, electricity, and water) before evacuation. City water superintendents recommend that the customer turn off all running water at the customer installed shutoff valve. The public is prohibited from tampering with utility shutoff valves or meters.
  - Make plans to put appliances and furniture up on blocks before a flood.
  - If you are a business owner, plan to protect as much inventory as possible quickly, such as creating temporary shelves to store expensive goods as high as possible. If you are a car dealer -- know where to safely park your cars during a flood emergency.
  - If you are a rancher, plan to move livestock to higher, safe areas before a flood.
  - Keep drains, grates and culverts free of debris throughout the year.
  - Try to keep a supply of sandbags and sand on hand, and learn how to properly fill and place sandbags. For information on where to get sandbags, call the Office of Emergency Services at 758-5560. Sandbags can reduce flood damages, but they have to be filled and placed properly.

**Do not assume that you will be able to obtain sandbags during the flood. The County cannot supply sandbags to private individuals.**

### What to do during the flood

- Keep your battery-operated radio tuned to a local station during weather conditions that you suspect may lead to a flood warning. These stations are:
  - KGEZ at 600 AM and KOFI at 1180 AM**
- Check the NOAA weather radio station for recorded information on river levels and flood predictions. Dial NOAA at 162.55 megahertz for more detailed Weather Service Information.
- During a declared flood emergency, the Emergency/information phone number for Office of Emergency Services will be 758-5560.
  - Call 911 ONLY during life-threatening situations.**
- Activate your neighborhood notification network.
- When flooding of the home, business, or farm appears probably, and only if time permits before evacuation, begin to implement your plan to reduce flood damages, such as:
  - ◆ Before evacuation, turn off the main gas valve, turn off electrical power at the main power switch, and if possible, turn off water. Do not touch electrical equipment unless it is in a dry area. Note: Gas can only be turned back on by Montana Power or supplier.
  - ◆ Move valuables to a higher location.
  - ◆ Move toxic materials to a higher location.
  - ◆ Fill bathtubs, sinks and jugs with clean water in case regular supplies are contaminated. You can sanitize by first rinsing with bleach.
  - ◆ Board up windows or protect with storm shutters.
  - ◆ Bring outdoor possessions inside the house or tie them down securely.

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- ◆ Secure fuel storage tanks.
- ◆ Move vehicles and equipment to a safe location.
- ◆ Put appliances and furniture up on blocks.
- ◆ Save business inventory.
- ◆ Move livestock to a safe location.
- ◆ Fill sandbags and properly place them to protect against water entry around doors, basement windows, etc.

**Remember -- sandbags should not be stacked directly against outer walls of a building, since when wet, the bags may create added pressure on the foundation.**

- If asked to evacuate your home or business, or believe that you should evacuate, take your emergency family supplies (nonperishable foods, water, blankets, flashlights, dry clothing, prescription medications) to your planned, safe, temporary housing. During large floods, shelters will be set up. Remember to offer help to elderly and handicapped neighbors.
- When outside the house, remember -- **floods are deceptive -- Try to evacuate your home or business before dark** as it is dangerous driving over flooded routes after dark. Telephone service may be cut off making it impossible to call for help.
- If safe to evacuate by car:
  - ◆ **Do** drive on a safe route that you have already established.
  - ◆ **Do** abandon your car quickly if it stalls in a flood area, and proceed to high ground.
  - ◆ **Do not** drive around road barricades placed by city and county officials for your protection. Serious injury or death may occur because of a failure to observe barricades.
  - ◆ **Do not** attempt to drive over a flooded road - **almost all deaths by drowning during a flood occur within a car or truck.**
  - ◆ **Do not** drive through flooded residential or business areas if possible because it forces

water waves into flooded homes and businesses causing more damage. It also hampers evacuation and rescue activities. No sightseeing -- citations may be issued to those who do not heed this warning.

Note: Road closure information will be sent to local news media, or call OES at 758-5560.

- Avoid walking or wading in flooded areas.
- If you want to volunteer your help during a flood, stay tuned to a local radio station for information on where volunteer help is needed.

### What to do during the flood

- Before entering a building, check for structural damage. Make sure it is not in danger of collapsing. Turn off any outside gas lines at meter or tank. If you smell gas, call utility company immediately. **Do not use open flame for light since gas may be trapped** --use a flashlight.
- Photograph or document your flood losses and contact your insurance agent for flood loss claims.
- Watch for downed electrical wires. Make certain that main power switch is turned off.
- Proceed with immediate clean-up measures to prevent health hazards. Perishable items pose a health problem and should be listed and photographed before discarding. Throw out fresh food and medicines that have come in contact with flood waters.
- Water for drinking & food preparation should be used only if the public water system has been declared safe. In an emergency, water may be obtained by draining a hot water tank or melting ice cubes. For more information, contact the City-County Health Department at 758-5760.
- Take all wooden furniture outdoors to dry, away from direct sunlight or to garage or carport. Carefully remove drawers and other moving parts as soon as possible.
- Clean metal at once then wipe with a kerosene-soaked cloth. A light coat of oil will prevent iron from rusting. Aluminum may be

brightened by scrubbing with a solution of vinegar, cream of tartar and hot water.

- Quickly separate all laundry items to avoid running colors. Allow clothing or household fabrics to dry before brushing off loose dirt. Rinse in lukewarm water to remove lodged soil, wash with mild detergent, rinse and dry in sunlight.
- Shovel out mud while it is still wet. Once plastered walls have dried, brush off loose dirt. Wash with household cleanser and rinse with clean water; always start with bottom and work up. You may have to remove your drywall or carpets. Ceilings are done last. Give special attention to cleaning out heating ducts and plumbing systems.
- Mold and mildew can be removed from dry wood with a solution of 1 cup liquid chlorine bleach in one gallon of water.
- Flooded basements should be drained and cleaned carefully. Structural damage will occur if water is pumped out too quickly. After floodwaters around your property have stopped, drain basement in stages, about one-third of the water volume each day.
- If your home or business has received extensive structural damage, this may be the time to elevate or flood-proof the structure.

### Future Actions

Flathead County is working with the Corps of Engineers, the National Weather Service and others to develop better flood warning and flood fighting procedures.

While the federal and local governments will try to assist during your disaster, nothing takes the place of your own personal preparedness.

The telephone numbers in this brochure should be reviewed and confirmed annually. If the number has changed, write in the correct number.

**Plan & practice your response to the next flood now - don't wait until the flood is here.**