

# Flood Facts

## 1. What is a flood and when do most occur?

A flood is the inundation of a normally dry area caused by an increased water level in an established watercourse, such as a river, stream, or drainage ditch, or ponding of water at or near the point where the rain fell. Floods can occur anytime during the year. However, many occur seasonally after winter snow melts or heavy spring rains.

## 2. What are flash floods?

Flash floods occur suddenly, usually within six hours of the rain event, and result from heavy localized rainfall or levee failures. Flash floods can begin before the rain stops. Water level on small streams may rise quickly in heavy rainstorms, especially near the headwaters of river basins. Heavy rains can also cause flash flooding in areas where the floodplain has been urbanized.

## 3. What are other causes of flooding in Michigan?

Ice jams and dam failures can also cause both flooding and flash flooding.

## 4. Are people killed as a result of floods?

Many people are killed by flash floods when driving or walking on roads and bridges that are covered by water. In fact, flash floods are the number one weather-related killer in the United States. Even six inches of fast-moving flood water can knock you off your feet, and a depth of only two feet of water will

float many of today's automobiles. If you are in a car and water starts rising, get out and move to higher ground.

#### **5. What is a flood watch?**

A flood watch indicates that flash flooding or flooding is possible within the designated WATCH area – be alert. It is issued to inform the public and cooperating agencies that current and developing weather conditions are such that there is a threat of flooding, but the occurrence is neither certain nor imminent.

#### **6. What is a flash flood or flood warning?**

A flash flood or flood warning indicates that flash flooding or flooding is already occurring or imminent within the designated WARNING area – take necessary precautions at once. When a flash flood or flood warning is issued for your area, act quickly. Get out of areas subject to flooding and avoid areas where flooding has already occurred.

#### **7. What is a flash flood or flood statement?**

A flash flood or flood statement is used for follow-up information regarding a flash flood or flood event.

## **Flood Safety**

### **Preparing for a flood:**

- Make an itemized list of personal property well in advance of a flood occurring. Photograph the interior and exterior of your home. Store the list, photos, and documents in a safe place.
- Memorize the safest and fastest route to high ground. Assemble a disaster supplies kit containing: first aid kit, canned food and can opener, bottled water, extra clothing, rubber boots and gloves, NOAA Weather Radio, battery-operated radio, emergency cooking equipment, flashlight, and extra batteries.
- If you live in a frequently flooded area, keep sandbags, plastic sheets, and lumber on hand to protect property. Install check valves in building sewer traps to prevent flood water from backing up into the drains of your home.
- Know the elevation of your property in relation to nearby streams and other waterways, and plan what you will do and where you will go in a flood emergency.

### **When a flood threatens:**

- If forced to leave your property and time permits, move essential items to safe ground, fill tanks to keep them from floating away, and grease immovable machinery.
- Store a supply of drinking water in clean bathtubs and in large containers.
- Get out of areas subject to flooding. This includes dips, low spots, floodplains, etc.

### **During a flood:**

- Avoid areas subject to sudden flooding.
- Even six inches of fast moving floodwater can knock you off your feet, and a depth of two feet will float your car! Never try to walk, swim, or drive through such swift water.
- Do not attempt to drive over a flooded road. STOP! Turn around and go another way.
- Keep children from playing in floodwaters or near culverts and storm drains.

### **After a flood:**

- Boil drinking water before using. If fresh food has come in contact with floodwaters, throw it out.
- Seek necessary medical care at the nearest hospital. Food, clothing, shelter, and first aid are available at Red Cross shelters.
- Use flashlights, not lanterns or torches, to examine buildings. Flammables may be inside.
- Do not handle live electrical equipment in wet areas. Electrical equipment should be checked and dried before being returned to service.

### **Where can I find additional safety information?**

Turn Around, Don't Drown are literally words to live by. This slogan highlights the nationwide flood safety public awareness campaign to help reduce flood-related deaths in the United States. The poster, a Turn Around, Don't Drown sign, window sticker, FLASH card, and a NOAA National Weather Service flood safety brochure are also available online at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/os/water/tadd>

We are gradually reducing the number of hard copy mailings of the newsletter and relying more upon electronic distribution and availability. If you are not getting an electronic distribution of the newsletter and desire to do so, please notify me. You may respond by e-mail to [thomasl@michigan.gov](mailto:thomasl@michigan.gov), or mail to Les Thomas, MDEQ-LWMD, PO Box 30458, Lansing, MI 48909.