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IMPACTS OF FLOODING



Northamptonshire
County Council
Flood Toolkit

Floodwater poses various risks including disease, hazards, and injuries; as well as damage to property, belongings and the environment. Therefore it is important to reduce your risk of flooding as much as possible.

Health Risks

Always assume that floodwater is contaminated. Any floodwater can carry dangerous bacteria that could cause disease; from drains and sewers in urban areas and from animal waste in rural areas.

If you must enter floodwater, wear protection such as wellies and keep your hands out of the water. Wash yourself thoroughly afterwards. Any item that has been in contact with floodwater should be fully disinfected before use, and any item that cannot be properly cleaned should be thrown away. If clean water is not available wet wipes or hand sanitising gel can be used as a temporary cleaning solution. Food that has been in or near floodwater should also be discarded including fresh food from the fridge or freezer.

The trauma of losing possessions, often with a sentimental value, and the smell and dampness that may take months to erase from your home, should not be underestimated. The whole event of being flooded can affect people emotionally and have an impact on your psychological health. The impact this has on your life can provoke or exacerbate mental health conditions. Many people can overcome this through support from their families, friends and communities; however if you think you might be affected by these issues you should contact a specialised healthcare professional.

Hidden Hazards

In general, do not enter floodwater that is moving, is more than 10cm (4 inches) deep, or if you cannot see the ground surface beneath the water. Just 15cm (6 inches) of fast flowing water can knock you off your feet and be enough for you to be unable to regain your footing. Bear in mind that water levels can change quickly and dramatically so make sure you can easily get to safety if water levels rise.

Floodwater can hide a number of physical hazards such as:

- raised drain covers
- open manholes
- kerbstones
- sharp items such as glass or metal
- other trip/fall hazards

Driving and Cars

Only drive through floodwater if you know that it is not too deep - usually this would mean no more than halfway up your wheels. However in most situations you won't know how deep the floodwater is, so if a road is closed do not ignore the signs. Just 60cm (2ft) of standing water will cause your car to float.

Do not try driving through fast-moving water as your car could easily be swept away. Just 30cm (1ft) of flowing water could be enough to move the average family car.

If you are driving and become stuck in floodwater, stay in the car and telephone 999 for help rather than try to get out - unless the water is shallow, stationary and you can see the ground beneath the water.

If you return to find your car standing in floodwater, do not try to move it and instead telephone for help or wait for the floodwater to subside, rather than try to get to it and move it. Floodwater can damage vehicle electrics. Sometimes the consequences can be dangerous, such as the airbags deploying suddenly and without warning.



Damage to Properties and Possessions

Flooding can destroy the possessions in your home. Whilst many of these may be replaceable, there are many others that can never be replaced or are not covered by most insurance policies. These are the possessions that you should try to protect against or move away from flooding. These include photo albums, family memorabilia and other items with sentimental value, pets, personal data on your PC, laptop or other devices, and important documents such as birth certificates and passports.

Having a Household Flood Plan in place will remind you what you need to do to prepare your home for potential flooding when you receive a Flood Warning, thereby reducing the potential damage to these irreplaceable items. More information on how to complete a Household Flood Plan can be found below:

<http://www.floodtoolkit.com/how-to-guides/community-project/#community-emergency-plan>

However, the impact of floodwater within your home is not limited to your possessions. Floodwater can cause damage to the very fabric of your building and it could take months or years to repair the damage. The damage to your property depends on how deep the floodwater gets:

- Even if floodwater does not reach your front door, it could still enter basements, cellars or flood voids, and could even damage your foundations.
- Shallow flooding (less than 0.5m/1.5ft) can cause significant damage inside your home. Floors and walls become saturated requiring cleaning and drying or even replacement flooring. Floodwater at this depth could also damage the electricity meter/fuse-box, gas meter, boilers and telephone services. Remember this also means there is a risk of electrocution if you have not turned your electricity off. Furniture, kitchen units and electrical appliances may also need replacing, as well as food in the cupboards, fridge and freezer.
- Deep flooding (over 0.5m/1.5ft) could cause significant structural damage to your property in addition to all the damage for shallower flooding.

For information on how to protect your home from flooding, see the advice on Flood Prevention on the Northamptonshire County Council Flood Toolkit:

<http://www.floodtoolkit.com/risk/prevention/>

Environmental Impacts

Animals at almost all stages of the food chain, from insects to small mammals and birds, can be affected by flooding, whether directly through drowning or indirectly through lack of food. Many animals could also be poisoned by floodwater redistributing contaminants, pesticides and toxic chemicals. If you are in charge of livestock, move them to higher ground when you get warning of flooding or significant rainfall. Contaminated floodwater can also pollute rivers and lakes, getting into the water cycle.

Further Information and Contacts

For more information on cleaning up after flooding:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/weather/Pages/flood-safety.aspx>

For more information on the dangers of driving during floodwater:

http://www.theaa.com/motoring_advice/seasonal/flood-water-dangers.html

For more information on mental health after floods:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flooding-health-advice-mental-health-following-floods>



Floodline number: 0345 988 1188



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