

Preparing for the Next Flood

A Checklist for Homeowners

When you hear on the radio or TV that there is a “Flood Watch” or a “Flood Warning” it’s too late to begin preparing for the high water. There will be many critical things that you will forget in the rush to prepare.

This Checklist is a way for the homeowner to make sure that critical items are considered and preparations made for them before the storm comes. Then you can take effective action in the short time between learning that a flood is about to hit and when it hits, sometimes only a few minutes.

There are five general areas that need your detailed attention and analysis to prepare an overall strategy and specific actions to be taken in the event of a flood: (1) The House and Contents; (2) The Yard and Surrounding Property; (3) The Stream, Brook or River; (4) The Driveway and Nearby Road, Ditches, Culverts and Bridges; and (5) The Larger Community and Watershed. The last category, (6) Just before the Flood Hits – Taking Action, is just as crucial, if not more so, to be sure what needs to be done is done as the flood hits and progresses.

1. The House and Contents:

- Remove and/or elevate items in the basement
- Evaluate the basement – Should the foundation be reinforced to strengthen it and reduce water in-flow?
- Should the house be raised or “razed?”
- Check out the National Flood Insurance Program and see if flood insurance is right for you
- Sump pump and backup pump are adequate and operational
- Generator to run sump pump(s) when power is out (and extra gas)
- Easily available electrical plug-ins to sumps (capable of being reached during high water)
- Basement bulkhead door fastened and entries sandbagged
- Switch to turn off furnace/boiler is located for easy access (not in the basement, rather at the top of the basement stairs)
- Switch to turn off electrical breakers is easily accessible (have alternate breakers on first floor or outside)
- Bag, box or pack of essentials that you do not want to be flooded that you can easily carry with you to the car when you drive it to a higher location (computer, cell phone, battery powered radio, wallet/purse, glasses, any prescription drugs, overnight bag with toiletries, pillow, blanket, some food and water....)
- Flashlights, candles and matches to use when power goes out
- Drinking water containers available to be filled for use after flood recedes and power is out

- Prepare a written “Flood Plan” that clearly lists all the things that need to be done when a flood threatens and post the “Flood Plan” with clear instructions for yourself and others who may be responsible at the time

2. The Yard and Surrounding Property:

- Have a plan to move vehicles to higher ground
- Move any yard items to higher ground or anchor them
- Anchor above ground propane tanks
- Keep under ground propane tanks filled (if near empty they may pop out of the ground like a cork on water)
- Know how to close valves on propane tanks (these can be fire hazards when they are ripped off foundations and pipes break off)
- Do not store any items in the yard, and especially on the riverbank or near the river, that could be carried away (causing harm or damage downstream) or damaged by a flood

3. The Stream, Brook or River:

- Check local flood plain maps and zoning regulations to see if you are in or near to a flood plain (where flood water will inundate your land) or a floodway (where the erosive forces of flood waters are severe enough to erode the land)
- Analyze as best you can (maybe with the help of someone knowledgeable about flood matters) the potential hazards of debris and ice jam flooding that may occur both inside and outside of mapped flood hazard areas
- Check any flood protective measures/structures (rock walls, vanes, grass waterways and water bars) that may have been put in place to see if they are in proper repair)
- Watch for sudden changes in water level, flows and formation of debris or ice jams
- Have a plan for evacuation and the safest and quickest way to higher ground

4. The Driveway and Nearby Roads, Ditches, Culverts and Bridges:

- Maintain your driveway and check to determine if your driveway is vulnerable to erosion by floodwaters. If so, install/modify water bars, culverts, and ditches as needed (this is especially critical if the driveway is needed to escape to higher ground)
- Nearby culverts and bridges can be plugged with debris and cause flooding to your property that you may not expect
- Some roads can be a conduit for high waters. Check to see if this might be the case for your property.

5. The Larger Community and Watershed:

- Check your town's emergency preparedness plans and incorporate them into your plans
- Be aware of changes in your area (watershed) that may affect flooding, such as increased storm water runoff and alterations that may increase flooding (e.g., large developments, logging and stream alterations upstream)
- Talk to your neighbors and exchange ideas and information about preparing for the next flood and how you can help each other.
- If you are away on vacation, arrange for someone to do what needs to be done in case a flood occurs while you are away.

6. Just before the Flood Hits - Taking Action

- Place bag of essentials in vehicle and move them to higher ground
- Sand bag entries as needed
- Shut off propane valves
- Shut off furnace/boiler
- Set up generator and start up if power goes out
- Plug sump pumps into running generator
- Trip electrical breakers to house when water level threatens electrical panels
- If you smell propane, extinguish candles, do not light matches and leave the area
- Listen to the radio for flood updates
- Stay alert to sudden changes in water level, flows and formation of debris or ice jams
- *Remind yourself that the value of your property in no way compares to the value of your life.*

Once you have considered the above items, and any others that are peculiar to your own situation, prepare your site-specific flood preparation and evacuation plan. And become familiar with it, by going through the motions to carry it out to see if it works, revising it as needed where you find it lacking. And be sure that all items are available, that you know where they are, and that all equipment is in good working order.

Be prepared. It will certainly save dollars and reduce stress and it may save your life.

Friends of the Mad River would appreciate your help. Please take some time to make your comments on this Checklist so it can be updated for the next presentation on Sept. 25. Send your comments to Friends of the Mad River, PO Box 255, Waitsfield, VT 05673 or email them to Caitrin Noel friends@madriver.com Thanks

