

Water, Water, Everywhere

Water is essential to life on Earth. About 70 percent of the planet's surface is covered by water. But when there is too much water flowing across the land, it can be dangerous. Floods can consume communities and cause serious damage.

Flooding occurs when there are heavy rains, such as during thunderstorms or from hurricanes. Flooding also happens when a river overflows or when a dam or levee breaks. During a flood, water covers an area of land that is normally dry. Flooding can happen in any part of the United States. In fact, flooding can involve as little as a few inches of water or enough water to cover a house.

Most floods develop over hours or even days, but some floods occur with little warning.

These are called flash floods. They can be very dangerous. Flash floods are a wall of roaring water that brings rocks, mud, and other debris along with it.

Water can be a very powerful and destructive force. During a flood, human-made structures are often not strong enough to resist the force of the water. Homes, bridges, trees, and cars can be torn loose and swept away by the water.

People who live in low-lying areas, near waterways, or close to a levee or dam are most



Flood waters can cause serious damage to cars.

at risk during a flood. People who live in areas affected by drought are also at risk. During a drought, there is little rainfall. The soil turns dry and hard. When such an area is hit by heavy rainfall, the rush of water cannot penetrate the dry soil. Instead, much of the water stays on the surface and floods the surrounding area.



Homes near bodies of water are at greater risk of being flooded.

Human activity also plays a part in flooding. As more buildings are constructed, more open

land is used. This open land acts as a sponge, absorbing rain as it falls. In cities, the water stays on the surface, flowing quickly across the concrete. Most cities include storm sewers. These are designed to catch and control water, but sometimes there is simply too much water and flooding occurs.

What can you do before a flood occurs? Identify any flood hazards where you live. During a flood, find a way to safely move to higher ground. If you have to leave your home, do not walk through moving water. People can be knocked down by as little as six inches of water.

Floods are a common hazard in the United States, but they are mostly natural events. Anywhere it rains is at risk of flooding. The best way to stay safe is to be familiar with your surroundings. Know what to do and where to go if a flood occurs.

DID YOU KNOW?

Floods often occur in spring and summer when thunderstorms bring heavy rain. Floods cause about \$6 billion dollars in damage.