



# City of Johnstown Emergency Management Agency

## Floods



Flooding is the most frequent and damaging natural disaster that occurs throughout the Commonwealth. Many of Pennsylvania's communities are located along waterways. This was due in part to our early reliance on water for transportation and then as an energy source for industry. Many low-lying areas were developed long before science identified these areas as flood plains. As such, homes and personal property, business and industry, and public infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, railways and public utilities may be at risk of flood related damage and loss. The immediate economic loss and community disruption from flooding is frequently compounded when flood-damaged businesses elect not to rebuild. Since 1970, there have been more than 20 presidentially declared major disasters triggered by flooding.

### What Is A Flood?

Floods are the most common and widespread of all natural disasters--except fire. Most communities in the United States have experienced some kind of flooding, after spring rains, heavy thunderstorms, or winter snow thaws.

A flood, as defined by the [National Flood Insurance Program](#) is: "A general and temporary condition of partial or complete inundation of two or more acres of normally dry land area or of two or more properties (at least one of which is your property) from:

- Overflow of inland or tidal waters,
- Unusual and rapid accumulation or runoff of surface waters from any source, or
- A mudflow.

The collapse or subsidence of land along the shore of a lake or similar body of water as a result of erosion or undermining caused by waves or currents of water exceeding anticipated cyclical levels that result in a flood."

Floods can be slow, or fast rising but generally develop over a period of days. [Mitigation](#) includes any activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening, or lessen the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies. Investing in mitigation steps now, such as, engaging in floodplain management activities, constructing barriers, such as levees, and purchasing flood insurance will help reduce the amount of structural damage to your home and financial loss from building and crop damage should a flood or flash flood occur.



### What Should I Do?

- [Before A Flood](#)
- [During A Flood](#)
- [After The Storm](#)
- [Know Your Flood Terms](#)



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### Fact Sheet: Floods And Flash Floods

#### Before, During and After

Nobody can stop a flood. But if you are faced with one, there are actions you can take to protect your family and keep your property losses to a minimum.

Mitigation helps! It lessens the damaging effects from flooding. Participating in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and enforcing sound floodplain management techniques are steps your community can undertake. Constructing barriers such as levees will also help reduce the amount of damage to your home and crops, while purchasing flood insurance reduces the financial burden should a flood or flash flood occur.

The most important thing is to make sure your family is safe.

#### Before a Flood

What is your flood risk? Your community officials or local emergency management office are your best resources to learn about the history of flooding for your region. Ask whether your property is in the floodplain and if it is above or below the flood stage water level. Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) are used to determine your flood risk. FIRMs are found in several places for your convenience:

Your local community map repository, usually, the building and planning departments.  
[The FEMA Map Store](#) for maps, flood studies, and other products on-line or paper copies.  
Call a Map Specialist for specific questions about your flood zone at 1.877.336.2627

#### Have disaster supplies on hand

Flashlights and extra batteries  
Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries tuned to a local station, and follow emergency instructions.  
First aid kit and manual  
Emergency food and bottled water  
Non-electric can opener  
Essential medicines  
Cash and credit cards  
Sturdy shoes

#### If you live in a frequently flooded area, take preventative measures and stockpile emergency building materials:

Plywood, plastic sheeting, lumber, nails, hammer and saw, pry bar, shovels, and sandbags.  
Have check valves installed in building sewer traps to prevent flood waters from backing up in sewer drains.  
As a last resort, use large corks or stoppers to plug showers, tubs, or basins.

#### Plan and practice an evacuation route

Learn flood-warning signs and your community's alert signals  
Contact your local emergency management office or local American Red Cross chapter for a copy of the community flood evacuation plan.  
This plan should include information on the safest routes to shelters. Individuals living in Flash flood areas should have several alternative routes. Request information on preparing for floods and flash floods.  
Develop an emergency communication plan.  
In case family members are separated from one another during floods or flashfloods (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), have a plan for getting back together.



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Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.  
Make sure that all family members know how to respond after a flood or flash flood. Teach all family members how and when to turn off gas, electricity, and water.  
Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1, police, fire department, and which radio station to tune to for emergency information.  
Be prepared to evacuate.

### **If Time Permits, Here are Other Steps That You Can Take Before The Flood Waters Come**

Turn off all utilities at the main power switch and close the main gas valve if evacuation appears necessary.  
Move valuables, such as papers, furs, jewelry, and clothing to upper floors or higher elevations.  
Fill bathtubs, sinks and plastic soda bottles with clean water. Sanitize the sinks and tubs first by using bleach. Rinse, then fill with clean water.  
Bring outdoor possessions, such as lawn furniture, grills and trash cans inside, or tie them down securely.

### **Once The Flood Arrives**

Don't drive through a flooded area. If you come upon a flooded road, turn around and go another way. More people drown in their cars than anywhere else.  
If your car stalls, abandon it immediately and climb to higher ground. Many deaths have resulted from attempts to move stalled vehicles.  
Don't walk through flooded areas. As little as six inches of moving water can knock you off your feet.  
Stay away from downed power lines and electrical wires. Electrocutation is another major source of deaths in floods. Electric current passes easily through water.  
Look out for animals - especially snakes. Animals lose their homes in floods, too. They may seek shelter in yours.  
If the waters start to rise inside your house before you have evacuated, retreat to the second floor, the attic, and if necessary, the roof.  
Take dry clothing, a flashlight and a portable radio with you. Then, wait for help.  
Don't try to swim to safety; wait for rescuers to come to you.  
If Outdoors, climb to high ground and stay there.

### **After The Flood**

Flood dangers do not end when the water begins to recede. Listen to a radio or television and don't return home until authorities indicate it is safe to do so.

Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance--infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.

If your home, apartment or business has suffered damage, call the insurance company or agent who handles your flood insurance policy right away to file a claim.  
Before entering a building, inspect foundations for cracks or other damage. Don't go in if there is any chance of the building collapsing.  
Upon entering the building, Don't use matches, cigarette lighters or any other open flames, since gas may be trapped inside. Instead, use a flashlight to light your way.  
Keep power off until an electrician has inspected your system for safety.  
Floodwaters pick up sewage and chemicals from roads, farms and factories. If your home has been flooded, protect your family's health by cleaning up your house right away. Throw out foods and medicines that may have met floodwater.  
Until local authorities proclaim your water supply to be safe, boil water for drinking and food preparation vigorously for five minutes before using.  
Be careful walking around. After a flood, steps and floors are often slippery with mud and covered with debris, including nails and broken glass.  
Take steps to reduce your risk of future floods. Make sure to follow local building codes and ordinances when rebuilding, and use flood-resistant materials and techniques to protect yourself and your property from future flood damage.



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One of the most important things that you can do to protect your home and family before a flood is to purchase a flood insurance policy. You can obtain one through your insurance company or agent. Flood insurance is guaranteed through the [National Flood Insurance Program](#) (NFIP). Here is where all of your questions will be answered about NFIP.

### **Your homeowners insurance does not cover flood damage.**

Don't wait until a flood is coming to purchase your policy. It normally takes 30 days after purchase for a flood insurance policy to go into effect.

### **Inspecting Utilities In A Damaged Home**

Check for gas leaks--If you smell gas or hear blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.

Look for electrical system damage--If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell hot insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician for advice.

Check for sewage and water line damage--If you suspect sewage lines are damaged avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid the water from the tap. You can obtain safe water by melting ice cubes.