

Flooding: Getting ready before and after



OVERVIEW

Recently we have witnessed some of the terrible effects of flooding in many different parts of Australia. In many cases, people don't know the flood is coming until just before it happens. Although nothing can be protected 100% from flood waters, there are some things you can do to make sure you are ready for the floods and to stay safe after the flooding.

This Bush Tech outlines what you can do to stay safe during flooding and how to prevent damage to property and infrastructure.

WHAT IS FLOODING?

Flooding occurs when storms cause a lot of rain to fall in one area, or stormwater to build up in an area. It often happens near water courses like creeks and rivers, or in low lying areas that can be flooded because water can't run off quickly.

Flooding can be really dangerous for a number of reasons. People can drown when they are trying to cross water. Waters can rise really quickly and trap people. Also flood water can carry and spread disease that can make people sick.

Housing and important infrastructure like water supplies, energy systems and roads can be damaged by floods. Flood damage can cause hazards and these present dangers to people and be really expensive to repair. It is really important to think about the effects that flooding may have when deciding what type of infrastructure you install and where you install it.

PREVENTION

The best way to avoid the affects of flooding is to take steps to avoid future issues and costs of flooding from the start. Think about the placement of buildings and infrastructure before they are built. Considering all other factors, if infrastructure can be placed in an area less likely to be affected by flooding, this is a good move. This includes houses, sheds, bores, tanks, generators and roads.

Some technologies are more robust when it comes to flooding and are less likely to cause problems. Houses that are off the ground (slightly elevated or in the 'Queenslander' style) can help avoid problems. Flush toilets can overflow and back up sewage into houses causing health risks. Carpet in houses that have been flooded will have to be replaced so it might be a good idea to stick with tiles or other floor coverings.

Making the right choices before flooding requires good local knowledge and advice from experienced technical experts.

PREPARATION

The most important thing is to ensure your own safety and the safety of others. Whether you evacuate or stay during flooding, being prepared before something bad happens is a important part of staying safe.

In remote areas, flooding can be an even bigger problem. Access in and out of areas could be difficult and help from outside could take a long time to arrive. For this reason it is important to be ready and have equipment and supplies handy.

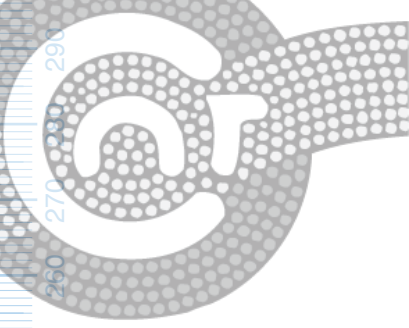
If you can receive radio broadcasts, use a portable battery-powered radio to listen for up-to-date information about flooding in your area.

Before flooding there are a few things you should do:

Make sure you know where to evacuate to if flooding occurs. Always check to see if the way you need to travel is safe – local council, shire offices or local police should be able to help.

Have some basic equipment ready such as:

- Containers for basic food and water storage.
- Fuel for cooking or boiling water, torches, matches or a lighter and other basic equipment – the same kind of things you would take camping.
- Always keep some food in your pantry that can be stored and easily used for emergency situations (like tinned food) as well as supplies of clean drinking water.



Once the flooding has subsided and you return to your property, there are a number of things you should do to stay safe:

- If you suspect your water storage has been contaminated, always boil your water before drinking it.
- Secure your water supply by conducting a risk assessment, flushing pipes and disinfecting tanks.
- Don't use electrical or gas equipment that has been flooded until it has been checked.
- Stay clear of fallen power lines on the ground and if you see them, make sure you let others know. If possible, call 000 for assistance.

Different local conditions mean that flooding will affect every community in different ways. It is important to have good local knowledge about where to go and what to do if an emergency situation like flooding occurs.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information can be accessed on-line about steps to take for flood preparation. The Health Departments in QLD, NSW, WA, NT and VIC all have information available on their websites on how to stay safe during the flood and afterwards during the cleanup.

Here are some useful website links on flood preparation:

Queensland: www.health.qld.gov.au/healthieryou/disaster/

New South Wales: www.emergency.health.nsw.gov.au/floods/index.asp

Victoria: www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/emergency_mgmt/flood.htm

Northern Territory:

www.health.nt.gov.au/Environmental_Health/Disaster_Management/index.aspx

Western Australia:

www.public.health.wa.gov.au/cproot/3626/2/Recovering%20After%20the%20Flood.pdf

The Northern Territory Emergency Service has useful information on preparation for flooding, including getting an emergency kit together:

www.pfes.nt.gov.au/index.cfm?fuseaction=page&p=484&m=45&sm=144&ssm=42

Information on disinfecting water tanks is available in Bushtech number 33.

You can download this at: www.icat.org.au

Information about stormwater is available in the National Indigenous Infrastructure Guide. Download the relevant chapter:

<http://www.icat.org.au/NIIG/06%20-%20B2%20Stormwater.pdf>

- Be familiar with your water supply, how to conduct a risk assessment and carrying out operations like disinfecting a water tank with bleach.

If it looks like your home or community is going to be flooded, steps you can take to prepare equipment before you evacuate are:

- Turn off water, electricity and gas to the house.
- If possible, central electricity and water supplies should also be disconnected or isolated.
- If you have an inside toilet, sandbags should be put in the toilet bowl and over floor level drains to stop sewage backing up into the house.
- Store valuable equipment and furniture as high up as possible to avoid it getting wet.

DURING AND AFTER THE FLOOD

For safety reasons, whenever possible you should avoid entering floodwaters. Floodwater can carry disease that makes people very sick, can hide dangerous debris and flow very quickly.