



Emergency Preparedness
Canada

Protection civile
Canada

Self-Help Advice

FLOODS



Canada

Flood damage costs Canadian taxpayers millions of dollars annually to say nothing of the cost in terms of human lives and suffering. All orders of government work to reduce the chance of floods but the first line of defence is the individual. Each of us has a responsibility to protect our homes and families to the greatest extent possible. By planning ahead and taking sensible precautions you can do your part to minimize flood damage.

Flood threats to particular areas can usually be forecast by constant evaluation of rising water tables resulting from heavy rain, surveys of snow conditions in river drainage basins, meteorological observations and forecasts.

Flash or sudden flooding, in which warning time is extremely limited, can result from other causes such as earthquakes, tidal waves, hurricanes, violent storms or bursting of dams.

In all cases, local government authorities try to keep residents of areas likely to be affected informed of developments.

Through the media they will recommend actions people should take to limit or prevent disaster and detailed instructions by municipal or provincial authorities will be given as the need arises.

Checklist – Should a Flood Threaten

- **Electricity**

Shut off power in premises in immediate danger of flooding. Don't attempt to do so if the main switch is in a location that has already been flooded. If conditions are wet around the switch box, stand on a dry board and use a dry stick to turn off the switch.

- **Heating equipment**

Special precautions should be taken to safeguard or minimize damage to electrical, natural gas or propane heating equipment. If warning time permits, consult your supplier for steps to be taken.

- **Water contamination**

If through taste, colour or odour, you suspect that your drinking water has been contaminated, purify it before drinking by boiling, or by adding purification tablets, or chlorinating it with a bleaching compound. If the latter is used, add one or two drops per litre and allow to stand for 30 minutes before drinking.

- **General precautions**

- Make sure your battery radio is in working order and listen to local instructions.
- Have emergency food, water and medical supplies on hand.
- Move furniture, electrical appliances and other belongings to upper floors.
- Remove weed killers, insecticides, etc. to prevent pollution.
- Remove toilet bowl and plug basement sewer drains and toilet connection. A linseed bag or wooden plug is ideal.
- Disconnect eavestroughs if they are connected to the house sewer.
- Some homes may be protected by using sandbags or polyethylene barriers, but special methods must be used for each. Don't attempt this type of protection without specific instructions from your local emergency officials.

- **Evacuation**

If you are advised by the authorities to evacuate your home, then do so. Ignoring such a warning could jeopardize the safety of your family or those people who might eventually have to come to your rescue. When you leave take with you:

- battery-powered radio and spare batteries,
- flashlight with spare batteries,
- warm clothing, waterproof outer garments and footwear, and blankets,
- essential medicines, infant care items, personal toiletries and as many emergency supplies as you can,
- means of identification for each member of your family, and
- personal and family documents.

If using your car, drive with extreme care. If your car stalls in a flooded area, abandon it. Many people have died after being caught by rising flood waters while attempting to move a stalled vehicle.

Checklist – After a Flood

Care should be taken when re-entering your home. Make sure the building is structurally safe and watch for holes in the floor, broken glass and other dangerous debris. Flood water is heavily contaminated with sewage and other pollutants and poses a serious health hazard. Once the flood waters have receded, you must not live in your house until:

- the regular water supply has been inspected and officially declared safe for use

- every flood contaminated room has been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected
- all contaminated dishes and utensils have been thoroughly washed or sterilized either by using boiling water or by using a sterilizing solution
- adequate toilet facilities are available.

The yard area should also be cleared of all debris. Special effort should be made to remove any refuse that might provide a breeding ground for flies.

If children are present during the clean-up operations, they must be closely supervised and kept away from contaminated areas.

If, when you return, the basement is still full of flood water, drain it in stages, about a third of the volume of water per day. This will avoid structural damage which can occur if the water is removed too quickly. Water in a flooded basement should be disinfected every three or four days if the house is occupied. This can be done using four pints of liquid bleach. An attempt should be made to mix the chemical with the flood water as well as possible.

For instructions on how to disinfect and restore wells and cisterns, contact your local or provincial health authorities or emergency measures organization.

● **Heating systems and appliances**

Whether you use a wood, gas or electrical heating system make sure you have it thoroughly checked out by a qualified technician before using it again. The same rule applies to all electrical appliances and wiring.

● **Food**

Any of the following food items exposed to flood waters must be disposed of:

- the contents of your freezer or refrigerator
- all meats
- all fresh fruit and vegetables
- all boxed foods
- all bottled drinks and products in jars, including home preserves*
- and all medicines, cosmetics and other toilet items.

*The area under the seal of jars and bottles cannot be adequately disinfected.

All undamaged canned goods must be thoroughly washed and disinfected. Any cans with large dents or which show signs of seepage must be destroyed.

For other self-help advice on wilderness safety and survival and on what to do in windstorms, earthquakes, winter power failures, driving in winter storms, or nuclear attack, please write:

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