

Flooding Safety Tips

While there have been times this winter when we may have doubted it, spring will eventually arrive. With spring comes the seasonal risk of flooding.

Warm rain, melting snow, ice-covered rivers, and frozen ground can combine to produce flooding along streams and rivers and in any low-lying area. There is not much a homeowner can do to prevent flooding, but there are steps you can take to mitigate the effects.

First, flood-proof your home. Once floodwaters enter your home, damage is inevitable. If your home is prone to flooding you may want to consider structural modifications to minimize the damage flooding can cause. Some suggestions from the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS) are:

Safeguard in-home electrical systems by raising switches, sockets, circuit breakers and wiring at least a foot above the expected flood level.

Raise your furnace, water heater and any other anchored indoor equipment so that it sits above your property's flood level. Anchor and raise outdoor fuel tanks, air-conditioning units and generators.

Modify water valves. A flooded sewer system can cause sewage to back up into your home. Install an interior or exterior backflow valve.

If necessary, re-grade your yard to ensure that water drains away from your house. If you have a sump pump, make sure it is operating properly and that it is protected by a battery back-up.

Even without structural modifications, there are steps you can take to reduce the damage of flooding.

Move valuable possessions out of basements or other areas likely to flood. If you store items in a basement, use plastic boxes and use shelves to keep things off the floor. Consider rugs instead of carpeting for your basement. Move paint, cleaning supplies, and other household chemicals out of the basement. When mixed with floodwaters, these materials can create a toxic soup.

Keep the water out. Sandbags and other specially –designed barrier systems can keep floodwaters out of your home. Have a supply of sandbags, plastic sheeting, wood, and plywood available to create barriers. Move snow away from your house’s foundation and keep water out of window wells.

Apply coatings and other sealing materials to your walls to keep out floods.

Have a plan for plugging drains to prevent sewage back-up into the house and have the necessary materials on hand.

Second, stay informed. Know the flood risk in your area and make sure you know the limits of flood coverage in your insurance policy. If your policy does not cover flooding, as most do not, consider purchasing flood insurance.

Monitor weather forecasts and sign up for weather alerts from your local community. For the most timely information from the National Weather Service, purchase a NOAA tone-alert weather radio.

Finally, take last-minute measures as waters rise.

Clear gutters, drains and downspouts. Move furniture, rugs, electronics and other belongings to upper floors, or at least raise them off a ground floor. Shut off electricity at the breaker panel. Elevate major appliances onto concrete blocks if they're potentially in harm's way from flooding.

For more safety information on flooding and other disasters, contact the Cuyahoga County Office of Emergency Management at 216-443-5700, ema@cuyahogacounty.us or visit our website at www.ready.cuyahogacounty.us