

# Floods: What you need to know

## It CAN happen here! What you need to know about flooding in your community.

Floods are part of Ontario's history. Some of us remember the disaster of Hurricane Hazel in 1954. More recently, the Grand River flood in 1974 and the Huntsville floods of 1998 and 2008 were significant events.

### A backgrounder on floods

- A *flood* is defined as an overflow or inundation of water from a river or other body of water which causes or threatens loss of life and property and environmental damage.
- The severity and frequency of flooding is influenced by:
  - extreme rainfall
  - rapid snow melt
  - storms with high winds
  - soil conditions
  - ice jams – especially during winter mild spells and spring thaw
- The low lying area surrounding a lake or river, not normally under water, is known as a *floodplain* and is part of the water body's natural living space.
- Floodplains can be mapped and designated as areas likely to experience repeated flood activity.
- Even after flood waters recede, the emotional after effects of losses from a flood can remain for years.
- Flooding can also affect the operation of utilities which may affect community stability and its economy.

## What you need to know about flood management

- How extensive flooding will be in any area of Ontario is determined generally by topography, the amount of lake storage, the river channel route (meandering streams), the types of land uses and amount of inflow to the watershed.
- Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) has the responsibility for flood management in Ontario.
- MNR works with Conservation Authorities (CAs) and Environment Canada to forecast when and where flooding is likely to occur.
- MNR and CAs monitor watershed and weather conditions to predict flows and water levels within their areas of jurisdiction, and issue flood messages. Flood messages allow municipalities to notify the public of developing unsafe river and lake conditions, and allow individuals to take precautions.
- In 2004 the Ontario Government revised the Provincial Policy Statement to direct development away from areas of natural hazards such as floodplains through municipal planning controls. This results in stronger, healthier communities.

## What to do before a flood

- Know your flood risk
- Keep well informed by listening to the latest warnings and advisories on the radio and television.
- Prepare your home for a possible extended vacancy and collect necessary personal items you will require if evacuated, such as cash, medication, important papers and identification, change of clothes.
- Ensure that your cell phone is charged – it may be your only means of communication during an evacuation.

## EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FACTS

- Consider purchasing a battery-operated radio, or a weather radio to get critical information.
- Be prepared to place your pets in a kennel, as evacuation centers may not accept animals.
- Keep your automobile fueled.
- Evacuate if directed to do so.
- In the event of an evacuation, assist those with special needs such as children and persons with disabilities.
- Secure all boats and items left loose on and around piers, docks or boathouses.

### **What to do during a flood**

- Shut off the electricity, furnaces and the outside gas valves if safe to do so.
- Secure backyard furniture.
- Never try to cross a flooded area on foot.
- If you are in a car do not drive through flood waters.

### **What to do after a flood**

Flood dangers do not end when the water begins to recede. Take the following precautions following a flood:

- Seek out medical assistance if needed.
- Check on neighbours who may need assistance.
- Report any broken utility lines to the appropriate authorities.
- Do not use flooded appliances, electrical outlets, switch boxes, or fuse breaker panels until they have been checked by your local authority.
- The water in your home could be heavily contaminated with sewage and other pollutants after a flood. Listen for instructions from your local public health unit as to what to do.
- Disinfect the entire premises.

**For more information on MNR emergency management roles and information on this and other hazards go to MNR, Conservation Authority and Emergency Management Ontario websites.**

Go to: [ontario.ca/emergencymanagement](http://ontario.ca/emergencymanagement)