



# SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



## FLASH FLOODS PREPAREDNESS BEST PRACTICES

Floods are one of the most frequent hazards in New Jersey. They can result from severe thunderstorms, nor'easters or hurricanes, prolonged rainstorms, or rapidly melting ice. *Flash flooding occurs when it heavily rains on either saturated or very dry soil with poor absorption ability or in low-lying areas. Flash flood waters can accumulate quickly, move at a rapid pace, and come with little to no warning.* New Jersey communities have faced the challenges presented by flash floods, and other communities have the potential for this dangerous condition. FEMA recommends the “**Planning – Response – Recovery – Mitigation Cycle**” as a tool to prepare for hazards that face a community. The following are best practices for the Planning Phase for Flash Floods.

### Identify Flood-Prone Areas

History provides lessons as to areas that are prone to flash floods and those areas should be prioritized in planning; river and stream embankments, roadway intersections and underpasses, and facilities that have experienced flooding in the past. Forecasters agree New Jersey is in a phase where areas not historically affected by floods may be affected in the future. Longer-term planning should evaluate potential sites.

Due to recent natural disasters affecting New Jersey, please consult your Risk Management Consultant or your Municipal OEM Coordinator to check if any of your agency’s locations are in a flood zone. If any locations are determined to be in a flood zone, the agency should work with their Risk Management Consultant to consider purchasing appropriate National Flood Insurance Protection (NFIP) coverage, or similar. The agency should also review its deductible responsibilities in your respective JIF program with its Risk Manager/Broker. Please read the [MEL Bulletin on Flood & Named Storm Deductibles & NFIP Coverage](#) for more information.

### Have a Written Flood Response Plan

Written plans offer benefits to leaders, first responders, and planners. Plans in writing immortalize learning. Every event has lessons that should be captured and passed on to future leaders, responders, and planners. Plans are living documents; they are always evolving and are never done. Start capturing what you know and are doing now. You can and will add to it later. Key points that a Flood Response Plan will contain include:

### Prepare Public Buildings and Facilities for a Weather Event

- Test emergency generators regularly and check fuel levels at least 3 days before the storm.
- Store records in safe locations or have a plan to move critical records to a remote location.
- Move vehicles to high ground a day or two before the storm.
- Assign a worker to survey the exterior of the building.
- Check that gutters and downspouts are clear of debris.
- Secure loose articles that could wash away in floodwaters.
- Assign crews to clear storm drains in historical flood-prone roadways.
- Possibly preposition emergency road closure traffic control devices.
- Certain locations on public roads historically flood. High-impact areas should have a plan for road closure and detours per the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.
- Delivering the proper number and types of devices ahead of the storm can further safeguard the motoring public.

## Prepare Equipment and Gather Supplies

- Ready emergency rescue boats and high-water vehicles. Inventory personal floatation devices.
  - Fully operational with full tanks of fuel.
  - Headlights, defrosters, windshield wipers, and radios working.
  - Inventory and secure safety equipment.
- Ready pumps and other water transfer equipment.
- Ready chainsaws and personal protective equipment such as chaps, hearing, and face protection.
- Decide when and by whom public alerting messages will be sent. Will messages be distributed by automatic messaging systems such as Nixle®, on the organization's website, or via news releases by the Public Information Officer? Or a combination of all three?

## Prepare Employees

- Update emergency contact lists, especially essential personnel.
- Evaluate the use of technology, such as First Net®, to support your emergency communications.
- Remind employees of their responsibilities before, during, and after flooding
  - Prepare their homes and families so they can concentrate on their responsibilities as a responder.
  - Safe driving practices in torrential rain and on flooded roadways.
  - Wipers On – Headlights On
  - Do Not Drown – Go Around
  - Best practices for draining roads, clearing fallen trees, and managing downed wires.

The U.S. EPA offers a [Flood Checklist](#) for government agencies and utilities to prepare, respond to, and recover from flood events.

Sometimes, a flash flood is the result of an unforeseen and surprise storm. Preparing for forecasted storms is the best practice for preparing for the unanticipated storm. The response will be scripted and thoughtful if we prepare facilities, equipment, and employees starting now.