

FLASH FLOODS

Flash floods are the #1 weather-related killer in the United States. They occur within 6 hours of a rain event, unlike regular flooding which lasts longer, sometimes for a week or more. Nearly half of all flash flood fatalities are auto related. Even 6 inches of fast-moving floodwater can knock you off your feet, and a depth of 2 feet will float your car. NEVER try to walk, swim or drive through such swift water. If you come upon floodwater, *STOP! TURN AROUND AND GO ANOTHER WAY.*

How do flash floods occur?

Several factors contribute to flash flooding. The two key elements are rainfall intensity and duration. Intensity is the rate of rainfall, and duration is how long the rain lasts. Topography, soil conditions, and ground cover also play an important role.

Flash floods occur within a few minutes or hours of excessive rainfall, a dam or levee failure, or a sudden release of water held by an ice jam. Flash floods can roll boulders, tear out trees, destroy buildings and bridges, and scour out new channels. Rapidly rising water can reach heights of 30 feet or more. Furthermore, flash flood-producing rains can also trigger catastrophic mudslides. You will not always have a warning that these deadly, sudden floods are coming. Most flood deaths are due to *flash floods*.

Most flash flooding is caused by slow-moving thunderstorms, thunderstorms repeatedly moving over the same area, or heavy rains from hurricanes and tropical storms. Occasionally, floating debris or ice can accumulate at a natural or man-made obstruction and restrict the flow of water. Water held back by the ice jam or debris dam can cause flooding upstream. Subsequent flash flooding can occur downstream if the obstruction should suddenly release.

When a flash flood WATCH is issued, be alert to signs of flash flooding and be ready to evacuate on a moment's notice. When a flash flood WARNING is issued for your area, or the moment you realize that a flash flood is imminent, act quickly to save yourself. *You may only have SECONDS! Go to higher ground - climb to safety! Here are some survival tips...*

- *Get out of areas subject to flooding. This includes dips, low spots, canyons, washes, etc.*
- *Avoid already flooded and high velocity flow areas. Do not attempt to cross-flowing streams.*
- *If driving, be aware that the roadbed may not be intact under floodwater. Turn around and go another way. NEVER drive through flooded roadways!*

- *If the vehicle stalls, leave it immediately and seek higher ground. Rapidly rising water may engulf the vehicle and its occupants and sweep them away. Remember, it's better to be wet than dead!*
- *Be especially cautious at night when it is harder to recognize flood dangers.*
- *Do not camp or park your vehicle along streams and washes, particularly during threatening conditions.*

The rule for being safe in a flooding situation is simple: **HEAD FOR HIGHER GROUND AND STAY AWAY FROM FLOOD WATERS!**