



## **Flash Floods – Best Practices for Preparation**

Floods are one of the most frequent hazards in New Jersey. They can result from severe thunderstorms, tropical storms such as nor'easters or hurricanes, prolonged rain storms, 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.* Many New Jersey communities have faced the challenges presented from flash floods, and many 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 Safety Director offers the following best practices for the Planning phase for Flash Floods.

### **Identify Flood-Prone Areas**

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

### **Have a written Flood Response Plan**

Written plans offer many benefits to leaders, first responders and planners. Plans that are 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. They are never done. So start capturing what you know and are doing now. You can, and will add to it later.

Some key points that a comprehensive plan will contain include:

#### **Preparing public buildings and facilities for a forecasted storm event**

- Testing emergency generators on a regular basis and checking fuel levels at least 3 days before the storm
- Storing records in safe locations, or have a plan to move critical records to a remote location
- Moving vehicles to high ground a day or two before the storm
- Assigning 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
- Assigning crews to clear storm drains in historical flood-prone roadways
- Possibly prepositioning emergency road closure traffic control devices
  - Certain locations on public roads historically flood. High-impact areas should have a plan for road closure and detouring in accordance with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.
  - Deliver the proper number and types of devices ahead of the storm can further safeguard the motoring public.

### Preparing 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
  - Safety equipment inventoried and secured
- Ready pumps and other water transfer equipment
- Ready chainsaws and personal protective equipment such as chaps, hearing and face protection.
- Deciding 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?

### Preparing Employees

- Updating emergency contact lists, especially essential personnel.
- Evaluating the use of technology, such as First Net®, to support your emergency communications.
- Reminding 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
    - Don't Drown – Go Around
  - Best practices for draining roads, clearing fallen trees, and managing downed wires.

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