

## Emergencies - floods

Floods cost Australians around \$400 million each year. Southern Australia typically experiences flooding during winter and spring. The Bureau of Meteorology, in consultation with other services, such as water authorities, the State Emergency Services and local councils, issues flood warnings that help people prepare or evacuate.

The main flood types affecting Australia include flooding of rivers or drainage systems due to exceptionally heavy rains, and storm surges caused by tropical cyclones. Flash flooding carries the greatest risk of injury or death, since the sudden swell of water catches people by surprise.

### Flood history

Contact your local council to find out the flood history of your neighbourhood. Also find out how high your nearest watercourse must rise before floods threaten your home, and become familiar with the flood evacuation plans for your area.

### Have a household emergency plan

You and your family should work out an emergency plan in case of flood::

- Have an emergency kit already packed – including a battery-operated radio and torches, spare batteries, canned food, bottled water, a first aid kit, regular medication, extra warm clothing, gloves and plastic bags, and important documents, such as insurance policies and personal identification (birth certificate, driver licence or passport) and other items, such as a hard drive with photos and documents) Keep these items in waterproof containers or bags.
- Your radio should be portable and battery operated. Consider having a spare in case the first radio gets wet or damaged.
- Know where the power, gas and water mains switches or taps are located, and learn how and when to turn them off.
- Establish a safe household meeting point in case of a sudden emergency.
- In the event that you decide to leave your property, know the safest route out to safety.
- Have a contact person for you or your family to call to let them know that you are safe.
- Discuss how you will care for your pets or other animals on your property.

### What to do in a flood

Suggestions include:

- Move items you want to save to the highest point in your house (such as the top floor, attic or 'crawl space' – or even stacked on the kitchen table).
- Keep up to date with developments by listening to your local ABC radio station. The ABC is Victoria's emergency services broadcaster during an emergency and should have the latest information.
- Switch off the gas and electricity.
- Open the doors of heavy and airtight items (such as refrigerators) to allow the water in, otherwise they could be tipped over and damaged.
- If you plan to leave your home, then do so before the floodwaters rise. Don't forget to pack dry clothes, regular medications, important valuables and your mobile phone (and charger).
- Inform neighbours and authorities – such as local police – of your intention to leave.
- Know the safest route from your property to a safer area by checking the VicRoads road closures website at: [alerts.vicroads.vic.gov.au](http://alerts.vicroads.vic.gov.au)

- Listen to your local ABC radio or contact the SES on 132 500 to locate your nearest relief centre.
- Take your pets with you if you decide to leave your property.
- Flood-proofing your home (with sandbags or similar) is hard, backbreaking work – so ask friends and neighbours for help, and allow plenty of time to complete this task.

## **Don't take unnecessary risks in a flood**

People risk their lives by trying to travel through floodwaters. The cause of injury or death may include drowning, or sustaining heavy blows to the body and head while being swept along by the current.

To possibly save your life:

- Keep in mind that floodwaters are often deeper than they look. Don't try to walk, swim or drive through floodwaters, especially if you can see a current.
- Do not assume that good swimming skills will keep you safe. Swirling objects in the floodwaters, such as tree branches, could strike you.
- If your vehicle is overcome by water, leave it and move to higher ground immediately.
- Try to keep dry. Being wet and cold for any length of time could lead to hypothermia – a dangerous condition characterised by lower than normal body temperature.
- Downed powerlines pose a risk of electrocution.

## **Safety suggestions immediately after a flood**

Once the waters recede, suggestions include:

- Keep listening to ABC local radio for updates.
- Don't use any gas or electrical appliances before having them checked first.
- Local water supplies may be contaminated, so boil tap water until local water authorities tell you that the water is safe to drink.
- Avoid any areas that remain flooded.

## **Food supplies may be contaminated**

Floodwaters can affect food through direct contact or, indirectly, by causing interruptions to power supplies – affecting local refrigeration.

Throw away:

- Food that has come into direct contact with floodwater
- Any food that has an unusual odour, colour or texture
- Perishable foods (including meat, poultry, fish, eggs or leftovers) that have been left at above 5°C for more than four hours
- Canned food if the can is open, bulging or damaged
- Food containers with screw caps, snap-lids, crimped caps (soft drink bottles), twist caps, flip-top lids and home-canned foods.

For cleaning cans that are still sealed, not bulging and intact, but have come into contact with floodwater:

- Remove the labels
- Wash the cans
- Dip them in a solution of 1.5 cups of household chlorine bleach mixed into 10 litres of water (a household bucket) for two minutes
- Re-label the cans with a waterproof marker pen.

## **Cleaning up after a flood**

Flood recovery suggestions include:

- Start cleaning up as soon as possible. Tackle one room at a time, making sure you are working in a well-ventilated area.
- After talking with your insurer, as part of the clean up you should remove water-damaged possessions from the building (such as carpets and soft furnishings), and store these in a safe place. They may be required to be inspected as part of the claims process.
- Sweep out water. Don't forget to check for blocked drains in the shower and sinks.
- Open the doors and windows to help the house dry out. Open access doors to air the underfloor of your house too.
- Consult with a building engineer to make sure your house is structurally sound.
- Repainting and redecorating should be left for at least three months – until your house is thoroughly dried out. Painting or papering too soon may result in mould, blistering and peeling. Laying floor vinyl too soon may also trap moisture.

## Where to get help

- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- State Emergency Service Victoria (SES) Tel. 132 500 – for emergency flood or storm assistance
- SES Victoria Flood and Storm Information Line Tel. 1300 842 737
- Recovering from floods, State Government of Victoria
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice 24 hours, 7 days a week.
- Your local council
- Your insurance company.

## Things to remember

- Floods cost Australians around \$400 million every year.
- Southern Australia typically experiences flooding during winter and spring.
- Contact your local council to find out the flood history of your neighbourhood.
- Your family should devise an emergency plan in case of flood.
- Don't try to walk, swim or drive through flood waters.
- Listen to ABC local radio for updates.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

DHS - Emergency Management

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