

# Floods

Floods are one of the most common hazards in the United States. Flood effects can be local, impacting a neighborhood or community, or very large, affecting entire river basins and multiple states.

However, all floods are not alike. Some floods develop slowly, sometimes over a period of days. But flash floods can develop quickly, sometimes in just a few minutes and without any visible signs of rain. Flash floods often have a dangerous wall of roaring water that carries rocks, mud, and other debris and can sweep away most things in its path. Overland flooding occurs outside a defined river or stream, such as when a levee is breached, but still can be destructive. Flooding can also occur when a dam breaks, producing effects similar to flash floods.

Be aware of flood hazards no matter where you live, but especially if you live in a low-lying area, near water or downstream from a dam. Even very small streams, gullies, creeks, culverts, dry streambeds, or low-lying ground that appear harmless in dry weather can flood. Every state is at risk from this hazard.

## Flood: Know Your Terms

Familiarize yourself with these terms to help identify a flood hazard:

**Flood Watch:**

Flooding is possible. Tune in to NOAA Weather Radio, commercial radio, or television for information.

**Flash Flood Watch:**

Flash flooding is possible. Be prepared to move to higher ground; listen to NOAA Weather Radio, commercial radio, or television for information.

**Flood Warning:**

Flooding is occurring or will occur soon; if advised to evacuate, do so immediately.

**Flash Flood Warning:**

A flash flood is occurring; seek higher ground on foot immediately.