

# FLOODS

ARE YOU READY?



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY  
OF WOOD BUFFALO

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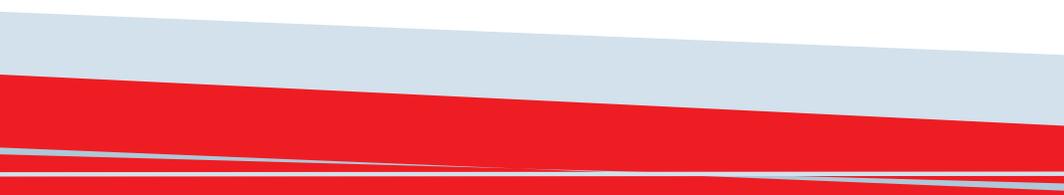
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# INTRODUCTION

As with many communities in Canada, flooding can occur at any time in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, especially in populated areas adjacent to the Athabasca, Clearwater and Christina Rivers. While floods cannot be predicted, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Emergency Management Department works closely each year with Alberta Environment to mitigate their impact. Officials monitor the Athabasca River upper basin, local river levels, precipitation and overall weather patterns, particularly during the spring months when the risk of flooding is greater. Numerous check points are placed on the Clearwater River to the south of the urban service area to provide warning of an ice break.

## AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION. . .

A lot of work goes on behind the scenes to reduce the impact of flooding in the communities within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Individuals, whether at home or work, play an important role. There are a number of important steps you can take to prepare your family, safeguard your property and protect personal items that cannot be replaced.

This pamphlet was created to help answer questions and, more importantly, to provide information on what you need to do to protect yourself against future flood threats.



# ARE MY FAMILY, MY HOME, AND MY BUSINESS SAFE FROM FLOODS?

## KNOW THE RISKS:

- Flooding is a natural occurring event in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.
- Floods can happen at any time of the year, and are usually the result of sudden, heavy rainfall or ice jams.
- Severe flooding can occur as a result of ice jams on the Athabasca and Clearwater Rivers during the annual spring breakup.
- Serious ice jams can be exceptionally deep and stretch extensively upstream.
- “River Breakup” along the Athabasca, Clearwater, and Christina Rivers typically occurs during the month of April.
- Areas within the municipality that are at greater risk are the Lower Town Site and Waterways Districts; which have experienced periodic flooding since the area was first settled in the 1870’s.
- Flooding can take place in as little as one or two hours, allowing little time to implement emergency measures.

While flash or sudden flooding limits the warning time that residents and businesses may have, there are steps you can take to mitigate its effects on your family and your property.

# ADVISORIES & WARNINGS IN ALBERTA

One of the services that Alberta Environment provides is timely information on forecasts and advisories in effect. It is important to understand their meaning:

<b>HIGH STREAMFLOW ADVISORY</b>	Means that stream levels are rising or expected to rise rapidly and no major flooding is expected. Minor flooding in low-lying areas is possible. Anyone situated close to the streams affected (campers, fishermen, boaters & the general public) is advised to be cautious of the rising levels.
<b>FLOOD WATCH</b>	Means that stream levels are rising and will approach or may exceed bank full. Flooding of areas adjacent to these streams may occur. Anyone situated close to the streams is advised to take appropriate precautionary measures
<b>FLOOD WARNING</b>	Means that rising river levels will result in flooding of areas adjacent to the streams affected. Anyone situated close to the river should take appropriate measures to avoid flood damage.

Real time advisories and warnings providing information on high stream flows, floods and ice jams are available through the Alberta Environment website at: <http://environment.alberta.ca/forecasting/advisories/index.html>



# BEFORE A FLOOD

If you live in a flood-risk area, planning and preparation before an emergency are essential. Here are some simple tips:

## MAKE AN EMERGENCY PLAN

Every household needs an emergency plan. It will help you and your family to know what to do in case of an emergency. Remember, your family may not be together during a flood.

- Discuss what could happen and what you should do at home, school or at work if an emergency happens.
- Make a list of what needs to be done ahead of time.
- Ensure that local extended family members that you are responsible for are included in your plan (i.e. grandparents, parents, etc.)
- Store important family documents, such as birth certificates, passports, wills, financial documents, insurance policies, etc. in a water proof container(s).
- Identify an appropriate out-of-town contact that can act as a central point of contact in an emergency.
- Write down and exercise your plan with the entire family at least once a year. Make sure everybody has a copy and keeps it close at hand.

# GET AN EMERGENCY 72 HOUR PREPAREDNESS KIT

In an emergency you will need some basic supplies. You may need to get by without power. Be prepared to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours.

You may already have some of the items already, so look around your home. It is important to keep them together in one place so they are easy to grab during an emergency. The key is to make sure they are organized and easy to find. Could you find your flashlight in the dark?

Make sure your kit is easy to carry. Keep it in a back pack, duffel bag or suitcase with wheels, in an easy to reach, assessable place, such as your front hall closet. Make sure everyone in your home knows where the emergency kit is.

## BASIC EMERGENCY KIT

- Water — at least 2 litres of water per person per day. Include small bottles that can be carried easily if you must evacuate.
- Food that won't spoil: canned food, energy bars and dried foods (remember to replace the food and water once a year).
- Manual can opener.
- Wind up or battery powered flashlights (Extra batteries).
- Wind up or battery powered radio (Extra batteries).
- First aid kit.
- Specialty items: prescription medication, infant formula, pet food & equipment for people with disabilities.
- Extra keys to your car or house.
- Cash in smaller bills, such as \$10 bills (travelers cheques are also useful) and change for payphones.
- A copy of your emergency plan and contact information.



## RECOMMENDED ADDITIONAL ITEMS:

- Candles and matches or lighters.
- A change of clothing and footwear for each household member.
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each household member.
- A whistle (in case you need to attract attention).
- Garbage bags for personal sanitation.
- Toilet paper and other personal care supplies.
- Safety gloves.
- Basic tools (hammer, pliers, wrench, screwdrivers, fasteners).
- Small fuel driven stove and fuel (follow manufacturers directions and store properly).
- 2 extra litres of water per person per day for cooking and cleaning.
- Utensils.
- Household chlorine, bleach or water purifying tablets.
- Small fuel operated stove.
- Duct tape.

You can also purchase a pre-packaged emergency kit from the Canadian Red Cross at [www.redcross.ca](http://www.redcross.ca), St John Ambulance at [www.sja.ca](http://www.sja.ca) or from various retailers across Canada by visiting [www.getprepared.ca](http://www.getprepared.ca)

## STEPS TO PROTECT YOUR HOME:

- Review your insurance policy - flooding is not covered by a standard homeowner's insurance policy.
- Create a detailed inventory of your property and keep it in a safe place. Video recorders are an easy way to document what you have, (enable the date function when recording).
- Install backflow valves in sump pumps, floor, sink, toilet and washing machine drains in your basement to prevent sewer backups.
- Install weather protection sealant around basement windows and ground level doors.
- Periodically check your sump pump to confirm it is working properly.
- Landscape and build up areas against your foundation to keep water moving away.
- Confirm downspouts are functioning and install extensions to keep water away from your home.
- Ensure that water does not drain onto your neighbours property.
- If your property is next to a ditch or stream, keep the banks clear of brush and other debris.

## SAFEGUARD IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS:

- Never store your documents or other vulnerable documents, such as family photos, in a basement.
- Documents should be stored in watertight containers that can be quickly moved or taken with you during an emergency.



- Determine which route to take if you are ordered to evacuate.
- Ensure there is a full tank of gas in your vehicle.
- Watch for warning signs: increases in height and intensity of water flows, mudslides, debris in creeks, or colour changes in water.
- Stay away from river banks and streams as they may be unstable and dangerous - keep children away from these areas.
- Check on elderly & disabled family members not living with you.
- Make arrangements for your pets if you have to evacuate.

## DURING A FLOOD WATCH:

- If you live in adjacent areas, move furniture, electrical appliances and other personal belongings to floors above ground level
- Remove hazardous materials, such as cleaners and pesticides, to an upper floor or away from the area.
- If you cannot remove them, anchor full and empty propane tanks to a solid object with a chain or cable; turn off all valves.
- Obtain instructions from your gas and electricity suppliers on how to safely shut down utilities at your home.
- Bring in outdoor furniture - if you have time.

## DURING A FLOOD WARNING:

- Plastic sheeting, plywood & sandbags can protect your home - if you have time.
- Turn off utilities at main switches or valves and unplug electrical items only if flooding has not yet begun and the area around a fuse box is completely dry. Have a flashlight with you.
- Plug all basement sewer drains and toilet connections with a stopper, secured with a wood brace or weight such as a sandbag.
- Disconnect downspouts connected to storm sewers to help relieve the overloaded system.

# DURING A FLOOD: STAGES OF AN EVACUATION

Should an emergency occur requiring an evacuation, emergency officials in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo will issues a three stage evacuation process:

## STAGE 1 - EVACUATION ALERT

- Emergency officials will notify the population at risk of the potential need to evacuate.
- Information will be provided on the nature of dangers and that persons in affected areas should be prepared to evacuate.
- While you may have time to prepare your home, conditions may quickly change, with very short notice that you must evacuate.

## STAGE 2 – EVACUATION ORDER

- When issued, you must evacuate the affected areas immediately.
- Returning to the affected areas will be restricted while the Evacuation Order is in effect.

## STAGE 3 – ALL CLEAR

- Once the danger has passed, the population at risk is allowed to return to the affected areas previously evacuated.
- The danger may return, though, and an Evacuation Alert or Evacuation Order may be issued again.



## WHEN ORDERED TO EVACUATE:

- Always follow the instructions of local emergency officials. They may come door-to-door or provide information through radio stations.
- Do not remain behind - doing so puts you and your family at risk, as well as those who may have to rescue you.
- Each family member should have waterproof clothing and footwear.
- Remember your neighbours, particularly the elderly who may need your help or the assistance of emergency services.
- Take your Emergency Kit with you.
- Secure your home by locking all doors and windows. Leave a note on your door to inform family members when you left and where you went.

## WHEN LEAVING THE AREA:

- Follow all designated Evacuation Routes - do not take short cuts.
- Barricades are placed on roads for your protection. If you come across a barricade, go another way.
- Do not walk through moving water. Less than 15 cm. (6 inches) of moving water can make you fall.
- Standing water may be electrically charged from ground or downed power lines.
- Watch for damaged roads, loose or downed wires & fallen objects on roads.
- Do not drive through flooded areas. The water may be deeper than it looks. Moving water can quickly sweep you and your vehicle away.
- If your vehicle stalls in rising waters, all occupants should get out immediately and go to higher ground.
- Do not attempt search and rescue operations on your own. Call 9-1-1 for assistance.
- Do not return to your home or business while the Evacuation Order is in effect.
- Stay away from flood zones and response routes.

# RECEPTION CENTERS

During a flood, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo will establish Reception Centers to receive evacuees. These temporary facilities may be schools, churches, community halls, arenas, auditoriums, or other public or private facilities. The sites chosen will depend on the severity of the emergency and on what is available at the time.

The Disaster Social Services Team will play an important role during an evacuation by:

- Helping people to meet their basic needs
- Reuniting families who become separated during a flood
- Providing accurate and timely information about the emergency
- Helping people re-establish themselves once they can return home.

Reception Centers provide a number of services:

- Registration and Inquiry
- Temporary lodging for evacuees
- Emergency clothing
- Emergency feeding
- Personal services
- Volunteer coordination

Once out of the area, it is important that you register you and your family at the designated Reception Center for your area - whether or not you stay there. Pets may not be allowed in Reception Centers so ensure that alternate plans have been made for them.



# AFTER A FLOOD

Never return to your home or business until you know it is safe to do so. The local authorities will coordinate opening affected areas after a flood. Once back, it is important to listen to local radio stations in case you need to evacuate again.

## RETURNING TO YOUR PROPERTY:

- Exercise extreme caution when returning to your home or business.
- Do not enter any building unless it is structurally sound. Avoid areas that are damaged or contain dangerous debris.
- Do not enter basements or other areas with floodwater as it may contain hidden hazards or may be electrically charged.
- Floodwater is contaminated, making many items unsafe to handle or consume. Mud left from floodwater can contain sewage and chemicals.
- Inspections on electrical panels and appliances by a qualified technician will be required before utilities can be reconnected to your home or business.
- If utilities were not turned off before you evacuated, do not enter your property until it has been checked by a qualified technician.
- Before drinking water, check it for colour and odour. If you suspect it is contaminated, do not drink it.

## COMPLETE A DAMAGE ASSESSMENT:

- Use a camera or video camera to record any flood damage to your property.
- Do not discard any valuable papers that may have been damaged during a flood. Instead, store them in a freezer - they may be important later.
- Watch for information on Disaster Recovery Assistance programs administered by the Province of Alberta.

## CLEANING YOUR PROPERTY:

Protecting your health and the safety of others is important as you clean up after a flood. Some important points to remember:

- Arrange for child care while you clean to minimize their exposure to contaminated areas.
- Do not bring pets back until it is safe.
- When using electrical equipment, keep extension cords out of water.
- Furniture and other items in your home or business that have been flood damaged will have to be discarded.
- Contamination can spoil food and prescription medication - when in doubt, throw it out.
- Discard all contaminated food items including: fresh produce, packaged or boxed food and meats, damaged or leaking canned goods, bottled foods and drinks, (floodwater can seep under a cap or lid).

For instructions on how to disinfect and clean your property, consult your local public health office.

## REOCCUPYING YOUR HOME OR BUSINESS

After the danger has passed, do not reoccupy your property until:

- All utilities have been restored.
- The water supply & waste water system has been inspected and is safe for use.
- If damaged by flooding, your property has been thoroughly cleaned, dried and disinfected.



## NATIONAL RESOURCES

- PUBLIC SAFETY CANADA  
For more emergency preparedness information, go to [www.getprepared.ca](http://www.getprepared.ca).
- CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION  
For more information on reoccupying your house after a flood, contact CMHC at 1.800.668.2642 or visit: [www.cmhc.gc.ca](http://www.cmhc.gc.ca).
- CANADIAN RED CROSS - [www.redcross.ca](http://www.redcross.ca)
- ST. JOHN'S AMBULANCE - [www.sja.ca](http://www.sja.ca)

## PROVINCE OF ALBERTA RESOURCES

- ALBERTA ENVIRONMENT  
780.427.7617 Toll Free: 310.0000 [www.environment.alberta.ca](http://www.environment.alberta.ca)
- For regional or local information on emergency preparedness, contact your emergency management organization as follows:  
ALBERTA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
780.422.9000 Toll Free: 310.0000 [www.aema.alberta.ca](http://www.aema.alberta.ca)

## MUNICIPAL RESOURCES:

- REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WOOD BUFFALO EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT  
780.799.8085 [www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca](http://www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca)

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo,  
Emergency Management Department  
9909 Franklin Avenue, Fort McMurray, AB. T9H 2K4

780.799.8085 OR [www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca](http://www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca)

