

FLASH FLOODING

SUMMARY

Flash flooding is one of the most dangerous events that can occur during outdoor activities; however, because it happens infrequently in most areas, it is often overlooked as a safety consideration. While the majority of fatalities occur inside vehicles attempting to cross floodwaters, significant risks remain for campers and hikers caught in mountain passes, dry riverbeds, or near rising streams during heavy rain.

SAFE PRACTICES

Before your activity, review the [SAFE Checklist](#) and check for local hazards. Certain seasons carry a higher risk of flash flooding. Research your destination to understand if the terrain or timing makes a flash flood more likely during your trip. Signs it may not be safe to go include:

- Unseasonable heavy rain over several hours or steady substantial rain over several days
- Heavy rains in conjunction with a spring thaw (hypothermia can also be an issue here)
- Water levels rising in usually dry or low running streams, creeks, and rivers

MANAGING THE EVENT

- In hilly terrain, flash floods may strike with little warning, turning dry creeks into torrents of raging water.
- Never camp on low ground near creeks or streams— water can rise while you are sleeping.
- If driving, do not drive through flooded areas. One foot of fast-moving water can move most cars.
- Keep Scouts away from drainage ditches, viaducts, storm drains, and dry creek or stream beds during heavy rain.
- Do not try to “outrun” a flood. Move everyone to higher ground immediately.

WHEN HIKING:

- Wait for everyone to arrive at stream, then decide if it is safe to cross.

- Do not walk through a flowing stream on foot where moving water is above your ankles.
- When walking through or on top of rocks or logs over a stream, loosen pack buckles so if you fall you can easily get away from your pack and it will not drag you under.
- Be careful of foot entrapments and have a stick or pole to allow you to release your foot if it gets caught.
- Wait for everyone (use the buddy system) to cross before continuing with each person holding on to the person in front and behind. If possible, string a line across the stream so people can hold onto each other while they cross.
- Be familiar with the land features where you live, work, and play. It may be in a low area, near a drainage ditch or small stream, or below a dam. Be Prepared!

WHERE TO LOOK FOR LIVE INFORMATION ON FLASH FLOODING

- The internet (if you have access), apps such as Storm Alert, the weather.gov website, and local weather stations.
- A flash flood watch is issued by the National Weather Service when heavy rains may result in flash flooding in a specific area. In this case, you should be alert and prepare for the possibility of a flood emergency that will require immediate action.
- A flash flood warning will be issued when flash flooding is occurring or is imminent in a specified area. If your location or destination is placed under a warning, you should move to safe ground immediately and wait for conditions to improve.
- Campers and hikers should always check in with local officials, such as park rangers, who are good sources for alerts on flash flooding and other conditions. This goes along with— in those areas where it's required—completing any permits and letting the ranger know where you are going and when you will exit.

RESOURCES

- [National Weather Service flood safety tips and resources](#)
- [National Weather Service video on flash flooding safety](#)