



Flood Preparedness in Montana

As spring approaches, Montanans living near waterways can take a few steps to brace themselves for flooding. It's important to be aware of your surroundings, be self-reliant, and know when and where high-water spring flooding typically occurs. The following are steps to be proactive and safe.

BEFORE FLOODING

- Clear creeks and ditches of debris.
- Some modifications of waterways require coordination and permits from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Floodplain Management. Visit <https://dnrc.mt.gov/Water-Resources/Floodplains/>, call 406-444-6816, or contact your local conservation district for information.
- Consider flood insurance (typically separate from homeowner's insurance) if living in a flood-prone area. Coverage is available to most people through specific policies backed by the National Flood Insurance Program. Enroll in advance, as policies take effect after a 30-day waiting period.
- Don't wait for alerts about rising waters. Diligently monitor water levels. If it looks like flooding is possible, take action. Have plans for property protection and evacuation.

FLOOD FIGHTING

- Acquire "flood fighting" materials in advance. Stock up on some materials for creating dams and dikes, such as sandbags or hay bales wrapped in plastic. They are more easily obtained pre-incident at hardware and farm supply stores, and gravel and brick suppliers. Research proper sandbag uses online.
- Develop a property protection plan in advance. Don't hesitate to implement the plan if it looks like flooding will begin. Once flooding occurs, it is often too late to minimize damage.
- Don't go to bed thinking conditions won't change. Spring flooding in Montana valleys typically peaks in the middle of the night.
- Assemble a "72 Hour Kit" (see www.readygallatin.com/community-resources/family-emergency-plan/) that contains what you, your family, and your pets need to be self-sufficient for at least three days.

WHEN FLOODING OCCURS

- **Do Not Walk Through Flowing Water.** Six inches of moving water can knock you off your feet. Use a stick to measure and ensure the ground is safe before going through still water.
- **Do Not Drive Through a Flooded Area.** Don't drive around road barriers; the roadway may be washed out.
- **Stay Away from Power Lines and Electrical Wires.** Electric current can travel through water. Report downed power lines to the utility company.
- **Turn Off Your Electricity Upon Returning Home.** Appliances such as television sets can shock you even after they have been unplugged. Don't use appliances or motors that have gotten wet unless taken apart, cleaned, and dried.
- **Watch for Animals, Especially Snakes.** Use a stick to poke, turn items over, and scare away animals who may be sheltering in your home after they were flooded out of theirs.
- **Look Before You Step.** After a flood, surfaces are covered with debris. Those covered with mud may be slippery.
- **Be Alert for Gas Leaks.** Use a flashlight to inspect for damage. Don't smoke or use candles, lanterns, or open flames unless you're certain that gas has been turned off and the area has been aired. Contact your provider to restore utility services if they have been turned off.
- **Carbon Monoxide Exhaust Kills.** Use generators, gasoline-powered machines, and camping stoves outdoors. Charcoal fumes are especially deadly.
- **Clean Everything That Gets Wet.** Floodwater picks up sewage and chemicals. Spoiled food and flooded cosmetics and medicines are health hazards. When in doubt, throw them out.
- **Take Care of Yourself.** Recovering from a flood is tough on the body and spirit and may affect you and your family for a long time. Learn how to recognize and care for anxiety, stress, and fatigue.

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Photo: Gallatin County

Flooding in Gallatin County.