

# Flood Insurance:

## *Staying High and Dry*

Did you know that even if you don't live in an area considered to be at high risk for flooding, your home could nonetheless be vulnerable to floods? According to the National Flood Insurance Program 2013 ([www.floodsmart.gov](http://www.floodsmart.gov)), one-quarter of flood insurance claims are filed by individuals living in areas with low to moderate flood risk. Since almost any building in the country could be damaged in a flood, FEMA recommends that all homeowners prepare in advance for the possibility that flooding could hit their communities.

### **Insurance Considerations**

It is important to note that flooding is not covered under homeowners insurance. However, special flood insurance policies backed by the Federal government can be purchased by homeowners and building owners living in one of nearly 20,000 communities across the country that participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The residents and businesses in these communities are offered flood coverage in exchange for enforcing floodplain management ordinances intended to minimize future flood damage. Flood insurance premiums vary according to risk and coverage levels, but they are generally affordable, especially for homeowners in low-risk areas. To find out whether you are eligible for NFIP coverage, visit [www.floodsmart.gov](http://www.floodsmart.gov).

It is essential to secure insurance coverage well before flooding strikes. Because the insurance typically does not take effect until 30 days or more after a policy is purchased, you cannot afford to wait until the water is lapping at your door to obtain the necessary protection. Also, do not incorrectly assume that the Federal government will provide funding to repair your home in the event of a flood. Federal assistance is only available if a disaster has been formally declared, and then the assistance offered may come in the form of a loan tacked on to your existing mortgage.

### **Tips to Mitigate Flood Damage**

In addition to buying insurance, there are steps you can take to mitigate the damage to your home if flooding should occur. To start, install sump pumps with back-up power in the basement or lowest level in your home. If possible, ensure that the electric fuse box, as well as all electrical outlets, light sockets, baseboard heaters, and wiring, are located at least 12 inches above the projected flood elevation for your home. Consider the same guideline for the placement of furnaces, water heaters, and other major appliances. To prevent sewage from backing up and entering your home in a flood, a plumber may

install an interior or exterior backflow valve. If the risk of flooding is high, you may want to consider sealing any openings around the base of the house, installing a drainage system, constructing floodwalls, or improving exterior walls. Finally, move your most valuable items, especially important documents and family photographs, to the upper floors of the house.

It is also useful to prepare a plan that you and your family can put into action in the event that a flood alert is issued. Make a list of tasks for individual family members, such as collecting water for drinking in case the tap water becomes contaminated, moving furniture from the basement to the first or second floor, bringing outdoor furniture and other items from the yard indoors, and shutting down electrical, gas, and water utilities before leaving the house.

Finally, practice your flood evacuation plan with your family, reminding them to stay safe by avoiding downed power lines, and by avoiding flowing water regardless of perceived depth, whether on foot or in a car. Have them operate under the immediate assumption that flood water is contaminated, indoors and outdoors, along with anything it has touched. Floods can be both dangerous and destructive, but even a small amount of preparation can go a long way toward protecting your family and your property, even in major disasters.