

What is a Flood?

What causes flooding?

Types of floods

Areas liable to floods

Effects of flooding

Before, during & after floods

Preventing floods

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Introduction to Flooding

Many of us have this idea that floods (or flooding) is simply, too much water around your house. People think that can be fun. Wrong. Flooding is a lot more than that.

Flooding is extremely dangerous and has the potential to wipe away an entire city, coastline or area, and cause extensive damage to life and property. It also has great erosive power and can be extremely destructive, even if it is a foot high.

What is a flood?

It is a natural event or occurrence where a piece of land (or area) that is usually dry land, suddenly gets submerged under water. Some floods can occur suddenly and recede quickly. Others take days or even months to build and discharge.

When floods happen in an area that people live, the water carries along objects like houses, bridges, cars, furniture and even people. It can wipe away farms, trees and many more heavy items.



Floods occur at irregular intervals and vary in size, duration and the affected area.

It is important to note that water naturally flows from high areas to low lying areas. This means low-lying areas may flood quickly before it begins to get to higher ground.

In this lesson, we shall see more about what causes flooding, the types of flooding, some effects of floods and what we can do before, during and after floods occur.

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What causes flooding?

Here are a few events that can cause flooding:



● **Rains**

Each time there are more rains than the drainage system can take, there can be floods. Sometimes, there is heavy rain for a very short period that result in floods. In other times, there may be light rain for many days and weeks and can also result in floods.

● **River overflow**

Rivers can overflow their banks to cause flooding. This happens when there is more water upstream than usual, and as it flows downstream to the adjacent low-lying areas (also called a floodplain), there is a burst and water gets into the land.

● **Hurricanes, Strong winds in coastal areas**

Sea water can be carried by massive winds and hurricanes onto dry coastal lands and cause flooding. Sometimes this is made worse if the winds carry rains themselves. Sometimes water from the sea resulting from a tsunami can flow inland to cause damage.

EXAMPLE:

Wrightsville Beach in North Carolina USA, September 14, 2018

*A massive North Atlantic Hurricane that covered a distance of about 6,500km made landfall. The hurricane was an unusually slow-moving one, and stayed over that location for a long time, with non-stop rains. This led to catastrophic flooding, as the land was already saturated from the wet summer. Communities such as Wilmington were cut off. More than 40 people died from the hurricane and massive destruction of homes and infrastructure occurred.*¹

● **Dam breaking** (raptured dam or levee) (Embankments, known as levees, are built along the side of a river and are used to prevent high water from flooding bordering land)

Dams are man-made blocks mounted to hold water flowing down from a highland. The power in the water is used to turn propellers to generate electricity. Sometimes, too much water held up in the dam can cause it to break and overflow the area. Excess water can also be intentionally released from the dam to prevent it from breaking and that can also cause floods.

February 26, 1972 - Buffalo Creek Valley, West Virginia

The failure of a coal-waste impoundment at the valley's head took 125 lives, and caused more than \$400 million in damages, including destruction of over 500 homes. <http://www.damsafety.org/news/?p=412f29c8-3fd8-4529-b5c9-8d47364c1f3e>

● **Ice and snow-melts**

In many cold regions, heavy snow over the winter usually stays un-melted for sometime. There are also mountains that have ice on top of them. Sometimes the ice suddenly melts when the temperature rises, resulting in massive movement of water into places that are usually dry. This is usually called a **snowmelt flood**

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Source:

1. CEDIM Forensic Disaster Analysis "Hurricane Florence 2018 (USA)" Short Report. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327906874_CEDIM_Forensic_Disaster_Analysis_Hurricane_Florence_2018_USA_Short_Report [accessed Oct 23 2018].

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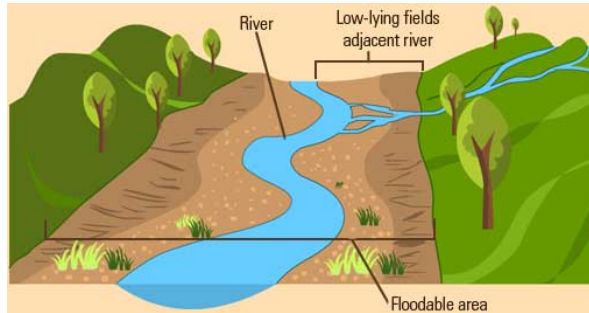
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Which areas are more likely to flood?

From the causes of floods and the types that we just read about, you can tell that floods are more likely to occur in some areas than others.



Generally, the natural behavior of water (and flowing water) is that it moves from higher ground to lower ground. This means if there is a higher ground adjacent a lower ground, the lower ground is a lot more likely to experience floods.

Additionally, anywhere that rains fall, floods can develop. This is so because anytime there are more rains bringing more water than it can be drained or absorbed by the soil, there is a flood potential.

In many cities, there are buildings springing up in many places where they have not been authorized. Some of these building are placed in waterways. Other places also have very bad and chocked drainage systems. The danger is that, with the rains, water will find its own level if it cannot find its way. The result is flooding and your home could be under water.

Any plain low-lying area adjacent a river, lagoon or lake is also more likely to have floods anytime the water level rises. This includes coastal areas and shorelines, as seawater can easily be swept inland by strong winds, tides and tsunamis.

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