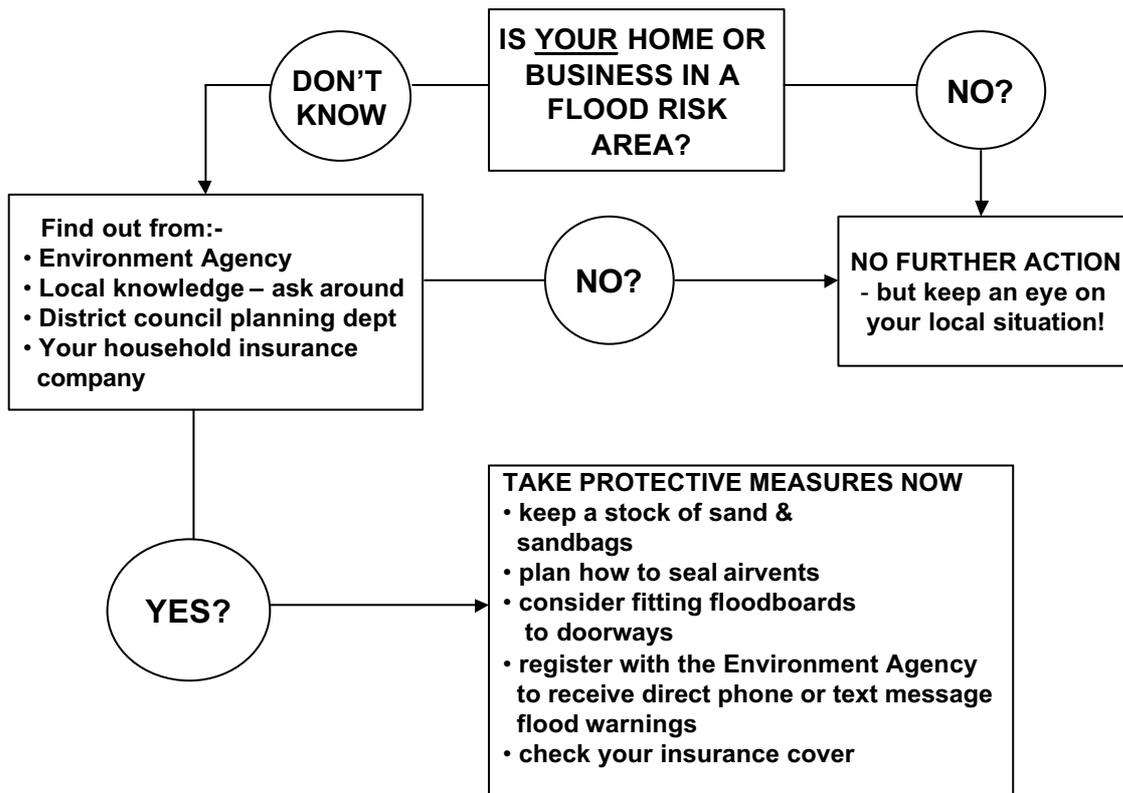


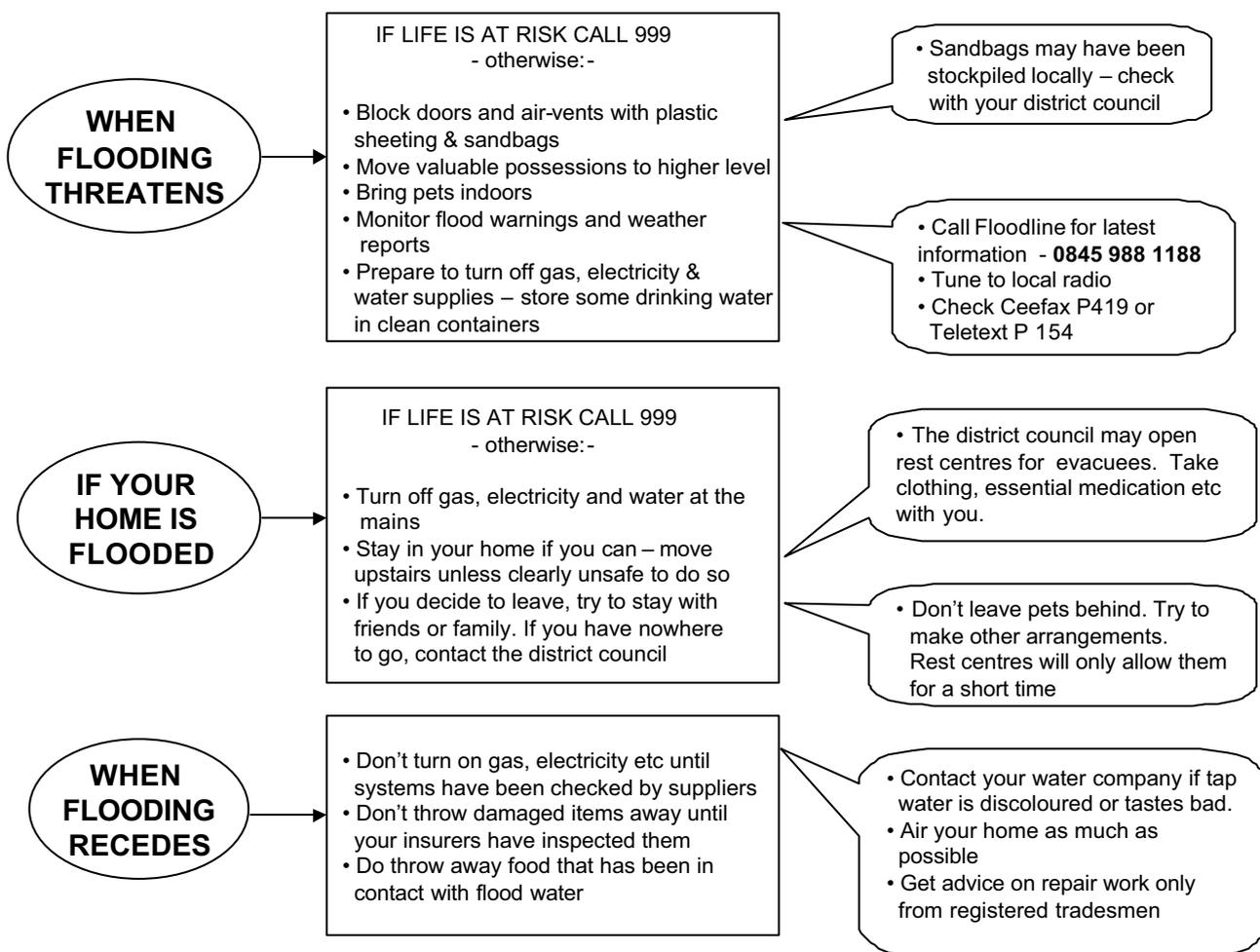
FLOODING – ARE YOU PREPARED FOR IT?



Where to get more information to help you prepare

Assessing flood risk	Environment Agency flood mapping. Your insurance company may also have data. Ask your district council planning dept Ask around your local area!	0845 933 3111 or visit the website at www.environment-agency.gov.uk/flood
Protective measures	Environment Agency leaflets & web site	call Floodline 0845 988 1188 for an information pack. Search the Environment Agency website for "flood protection products"
Sandbags	Local builders merchants/DIY stores - check Yellow Pages Local councils may supply, or have details of retail outlets	Bucks County Council web site has details of suppliers – www.buckscc.gov.uk/emergency_planning
Flood Warnings	Environment Agency direct telephone or text message warning for high risk areas. Ceefax p419 or Teletext p154 and TV & radio weather reports	Call Floodline 0845 988 1188 to register free of charge
Insurance	The Association of British Insurers (ABI) has information on flood insurance cover and advice on protecting your property	www.abi.org.uk 0207 600 3333

FLOODING – WHAT TO DO



FLOOD CONTACTS DIRECTORY

Buckinghamshire County Council

Highways urgent out of hours calls
01296 486630
Emergency Planning 01296 383228
Area Highways Offices:
- Aylesbury Vale Area 01296 383400
- Wycombe Area 01494 475315
- Chiltern & S. Bucks Area 01494 586600

Aylesbury Vale District Council

Urgent out of hours 07785 705766
Emergency Planning 01296 585370
Environmental Health 01296 585605

Chiltern District Council

General No. 01494 729000
Flood enquiries 01494 732229
Emergency Planning 01494 732012
Environmental Health 01494 732058

South Bucks District Council

Flood enquiries 01895 837360
Environmental Health 01895 837264

Wycombe District Council

Urgent out of hours 01494 463890
Sandbag provision 01494 421459
Emergency Planning via 01494 461000
Environmental Health 01494 421728
Land Drainage advice 01494 421453

Environment Agency

Floodline Service 0845 988 1188
General enquiries 0845 933 3111

Water/Sewerage

Thames Water 08459 200800
Anglian Water Services 08457 145145
Three Valleys Water 08457 823333

Gas

Transco 0800 111999

Electricity

EDF Energy 08007 838838
East Midlands Electricity 08000 568090
Scottish & Southern Energy 08457 708090

The following information, compiled by Buckinghamshire County Council, Buckinghamshire District Councils, the Environment Agency, emergency services and utility companies, is designed to provide a detailed understanding of flooding, who is responsible for what in flooding situations, what steps people should take to protect property and possessions, and what assistance can reasonably be expected from different agencies.

FLOODING - CAUSE AND EFFECT

In Buckinghamshire, as with other inland counties, there are three main causes of flooding, which are riparian (river), flash and groundwater. In all three cases the ability of the ground to absorb rainfall, like a sponge, plays a major part, and this will vary according to weather conditions.

Riparian flooding occurs when rivers cannot cope with the amount of water draining into them off the land. In the winter months this is usually because the ground has become saturated and can no longer absorb water properly, so when rainfall is heavy and/or prolonged run-off reaches the rivers faster and eventually they overtop their banks, as happened along the River Thames in January 2003.

Flash flooding can happen anywhere at any time, although it is more likely in the summer months when the ground is hard and dry. Sudden downpours, such as those associated with thunderstorms, cannot soak in fast enough and the water runs quickly off into drains, ditches and culverts that cannot cope with the volume. Sometimes there is so much rain that a hillside may have the soil washed off it – often into nearby properties.

Groundwater flooding is rare, occurring only when the underground water table rises to an unusually high level. After the very heavy autumn and winter rainfall of 2000/01 the water table in the Chilterns was at its highest level for decades. Springs and wells that had been dry for, in some cases, 50 years or more began to flow again and did so throughout the summer, causing property flooding in many areas. Groundwater again rose significantly following the very wet winter of 2002/03, though fortunately the drier Spring weather meant that levels did not reach a critical point.

Whatever the cause, the effects are much the same. If floodwater enters your property it will ruin carpets, furniture, household goods, décor and electrics. Often floodwater will be mixed with raw sewage, as drains overflow. Even when the flood recedes your home will take a long time to dry out and may smell for weeks. Plaster may have to be stripped off walls. If you are fully insured there should be no problem in getting the necessary repairs paid for, but the whole process will probably take months and the experience is severely depressing. People who have been flooded will often say that it is far worse than being burgled.

FLOOD DEFENCE

All watercourses – from small streams to major rivers – should be maintained so that the threat of flooding is minimised. The “main” rivers are overseen by the Environment Agency, who carry out flood defence work and maintenance. For ‘ordinary’ watercourses (ditches, streams, brooks, minor rivers) this means the landowner (or in the case of road drainage and culverts etc, the appropriate highway authority). Although there is no common law duty to *improve* a watercourse the owner of land immediately adjacent to a watercourse (a ‘riparian owner’) is legally obliged to ensure the water can flow freely (e.g. remove debris, excess vegetation), must maintain the banks and bed of the watercourse, and must accept flood flows through his/her land. Failure to comply with these and other responsibilities may result in legal action by other property owners. District councils can give advice and have discretionary power to take enforcement action against riparian owners to ensure that essential work is carried out. A useful Environment

Agency booklet, entitled 'Living on the Edge' explains the rights and responsibilities of riparian ownership in detail. It is obtainable free of charge via the Agency's general enquiry number **(0845 933 3111)**

However, in extreme conditions the capacity of any watercourse or flood defence may simply be overwhelmed and no one can be held responsible for what is effectively an act of nature. If people choose to live on low-lying land near a watercourse, at the bottom of a natural valley or alongside steep slopes that may drain off through their property they must accept an increased risk of flooding and take appropriate precautions.

FLOOD WARNING & FLOOD RISK INFORMATION

The Environment Agency provides a flood warning service for most main rivers, estuaries and coasts. They do not provide a service for most minor watercourses. Rivers and streams that rise rapidly in response to rainfall cause particular difficulties because there is insufficient time for the issuing of specific warnings. In some of these cases, a general warning service may be provided: in other cases, it will not be possible to provide a flood warning service at all. The Environment Agency do not, and cannot, provide a flood warning service in respect of local flooding from sewers, road drainage, overland flow, dam bursts or blockages.

When issuing flood warnings, the Environment Agency alerts the emergency services, the local authorities, the media (warnings are then broadcast on TV and Radio) and the public. People living in flood-risk areas can receive warnings direct (by phone, text message or e-mail) from an automatic messaging system. The service is free of charge. To find out more about it or to request an information pack on how to prepare for flooding, please call the Environment Agency's Floodline service (0845 988 1188). The Floodline service also provides up to date information on local flood warnings in force, as does the Environment Agency's web site:-

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/flood

To find out if your home or business is in a flood-risk area you can:-

- Check your location against the flood risk information on the Environment Agency's web site **www.environment-agency.gov.uk/flood/index.htm**
- Ask your household insurance company or call the Association of British Insurers (ABI) on 0207 600 3333 or **www.abi.org.uk**
- Ask your local council
- Ask long-standing residents in your area

PROTECTIVE MEASURES

You are responsible for protecting your own property. Not the Environment Agency, not the local council, and not the emergency services. These agencies will of course help where they can, but when flooding is happening over a wide area they cannot respond to every call for assistance at once. If your property is at risk from flooding then you should take reasonable steps to protect it beforehand. (Most insurance policies will say something similar). Here are some things you can do:-

Beforehand:-

- Call the Environment Agency Floodline **(0845 988 1188)** and ask for an information pack. This will include advice on how to protect your property.
- Review your household insurance cover. Is it adequate and up to date? Will you have to pay a large excess towards any claim for flood damage?

- If you live in a high risk area it is advisable to keep a stock of empty sandbags (DIY stores etc - Yellow Pages), and some sand. These can be filled when needed and used to protect doorways and air vents. **GET SOME NOW – DON'T LEAVE IT UNTIL THE LAST MOMENT**
- You can plan to protect external doorways with suitable boarding fixed across them, and reinforced with sandbags. You may want to consider purchasing purpose-made 'flood boards' which slot into door frames and seal them tightly. Details on such products are available on the Environment Agency's website:-
www.environment-agency.gov.uk/subjects/flood
- make sure you know how to turn off your gas, electricity and water if necessary

When flooding is likely:-

- fill and position sandbags. Don't overfill (about 2/3rds) and don't forget to seal airbricks and other low-level openings with plastic sheeting and sandbags as well (no sand? – you can use earth, not as good, but it will do)
- Move valuable items and foodstuffs upstairs
- Have spare clothing, waterproofs, wellingtons, torch, batteries, radio and food easily accessible. Electricity and gas supplies may be cut off
- Store some drinking water in bottles/cans in case the public supply becomes contaminated by floodwater/sewage
- check that neighbours know about any flood warnings that have been issued, especially if they are elderly, sick or disabled
- keep up-to-date by listening to your local radio station for news bulletins, or you can dial the Floodline number **(0845 988 1188)**

If your property is flooded:-

- If life is at risk dial 999, otherwise:-
- move people and animals to a place of safety – upstairs if possible, and provide a litter tray for pets
- If it is safe to do so, you should stay in your property as long as possible, if necessary by moving to the first floor. If, however, your house is completely uninhabitable and you have to leave you should go to family and friends. The District Council and Social Services have only limited resources to help in these circumstances and they will prioritise this help with the sick and elderly in mind.
- If you do leave, turn off gas, water and electricity and try to take
 - warm clothing, footwear and blankets
 - essential medicines, torch and batteries
 - baby food/nappies if needed
 - pets – which should be on leads or in baskets or carriers

Elderly/Sick/Disabled at Risk:-

If you think you may need special help, try to make arrangements in advance with friends and neighbours. Many vulnerable people are already known to Social Services, who will help where there are no friends or family on hand.

When the waters go down:-

Do

- wash your hands thoroughly after contact with flood water or items contaminated by flood water
- throw away all contaminated food

- disinfect food preparation/contact surfaces etc - a bleach solution is fine
- contact your water company if you notice any change in the taste or colour of your tap water
- air your building after flooding if you can - the less damp, the less damage
- tell your insurance company - they will send someone to assess the damage
- seek advice only from reputable companies about repairs, and only with your insurance company's approval

Don't

- attempt to switch on electrical appliances or circuits that have been affected by water until they have been checked by a qualified electrician
- dispose of damaged goods until your insurance company has had the opportunity to inspect them

ASSISTANCE

Although it is primarily your responsibility to look after your own property the emergency services, local authorities and public utility services will try to help where they can. When flooding is confined to a few isolated incidents they will assist with providing sandbags and possibly with pumping. However, with widespread and serious flooding their first priority will be lifesaving.

Fire & Rescue Service

In flooding circumstances the Fire & Rescue Service have a duty only where there is a risk to life or a risk of fire. They have only limited resources and there is often little they can do once the rescue phase is over. For example when a building is flooded and floodwaters are still high outside, there is no point at all in pumping water out.

County Council

In flooding situations the County Council are responsible for maintaining the roads and road drainage (not all roads, however, - some may be the responsibility of the Highways Agency or private owners) and for looking after the elderly, infirm and vulnerable. Where flooding is being caused by blocked highways drains or culverts the County Council (Transportation Area Offices) will work to clear them and can provide sandbags to help protect affected properties. Social Services will assist vulnerable residents whose property may be flooded, in conjunction with the district council. This may involve appropriate support to them in their homes, or temporary re-housing.

District Council

Principal responsibilities are for homelessness (i.e. helping to re-house vulnerable people made homeless where there is no alternative solution), for waste collection and for environmental health. Public health advice following a flood (e.g. on drinking water, food safety etc) is available from district council Environmental Health departments. Note that some councils may charge for taking away bulky items (such as soiled carpets and large household items) after a flood. District councils can usually assist in providing sandbags but rapid response capacity is limited and they will give highest priority to the most vulnerable.

Water Company

The water companies are responsible for the supply of clean drinking water and for the removal and treatment of waste water (i.e. sewage). Unusually heavy rainfall, typically in the form of severe localised storms, can overwhelm drainage systems and cause flooding, particularly in low-lying areas. In these circumstances untreated sewage may spill out into streets and gardens. The water companies will assist where possible to reduce the amount of water escaping from the system, and will carry out a tidy up of areas where sewage has been deposited once the flooding has subsided.

Householders are advised to check that they have no surface water pipes connected to the foul sewer and not to lift manhole covers on their property to allow floodwater to drain away, as both of these can cause flooding of properties elsewhere. Information on re-connecting surface water pipes is available free of charge from Thames Water or local authorities. A leaflet on waste water flooding called 'Household Customer Guidelines' is available from Thames Water's Customer centre on **08459 200800**.
