

FLASH FLOODS

No Time to Think Twice

Flash floods are sudden, massive and destructive. A driver in the flood path must act quickly. General knowledge of flood safety and flash flood procedures, plus an understanding of the dangers involved, are your minimum survival kit when a flash flood is imminent and there's no time to think twice.

How They Happen

Flash flooding and the flooding sweep of the storm surge are two deadly products of a hurricane's violence. Hurricanes arrive with winds sometimes exceeding 200 miles per hour, 6 to 12 inches or even more of rain and ocean surges sometimes 25 feet above normal tide levels. Even if you are not in the direct path of the storm, you may face the flood hazards. Flash floods result as the rainwater gather and are channeled into canyons and low-lying areas. Coastal and inland flooding remain the wake of the storm surge and rain.

Flash floods also occur in mountainous and desert regions. Sudden rainstorms may let loose great volumes of rain. If the rainfall exceeds the ground's ability to absorb it, the result can be the same as the hurricane's: sudden, dangerous, flash flooding in canyons, gullies and low-lying areas.

First Be Informed

If you are driving in an area where flash flooding is likely, listen to the radio for warnings from the National Weather Service. Follow their directions and make whatever changes in your route they recommended. If no warnings are being broadcast, but you can see trouble coming, take action to avoid danger immediately.

First, switch to an alternate route that keeps you out of low areas, dry river basins and canyons. Then stay clear of areas you can see are already flooded. If you're on high ground with a safe place to park--free of landslide danger--this is likely to be the best place to wait out the hazard.

Facing the Flood

The general rule for crossing a flooded section of road is: If you're not sure of the water's depth, stay out of it.

If your vehicle stalls in a spot you think is in danger of flash flooding--or you realize one is on the way, and you have no quick escape route--you have to act swiftly to save your life. Immediately turn on your four-way emergency flashers. Then get out and get to high ground.



Be especially cautious when driving through flash flood areas at night. Find alternate routes or drive through them by day if you can.

More Flooded Roads

Driving anywhere near a hurricane, you should be prepared to deal with flooding. Where roads are flooded, your choices are limited. Avoid flooded roadways if you don't know the water's depth. Whatever driving you do at this point should be towards high ground. Drive with caution. Watch for disabled vehicles and realize that only a narrow section of road may be dry enough to drive on. Take care to avoid downed power lines.

Park your vehicle in as safe an area as you can. Disconnect the electric lines if you're pulling a trailer. If possible, walk to a safer spot. If you are stalled on a flooded road, stay with your vehicle unless there is danger of flash flooding. If the water is higher than your knees, it's not safe to walk through it.

The Best Solution

Avoiding the danger is the best solution. You can avoid flash floods and hurricanes by being aware of the weather reports and planning ahead.

Hurricanes are most frequent from June through November in the Atlantic and Gulf Coast states. There are, on the average, three hurricanes per year in the continental United States. You should listen for weather updates and hurricane warnings from the National Weather Service. Plan your route to avoid coastal or low-lying areas if you can. Mark high-ground points on your maps and plot alternative routes to use in case of storm or flood hazard.