

THE FLOOD CURRENT

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 1997

OWRB Reminds Oklahomans Of Floodwater Driving Dangers

Almost one-half of flood-related deaths occur in vehicles, primarily when people drive into flooded highway dips or low-drainage areas at night, reminds Ken Morris, state NFIP coordinator.

"It's a case of what you can't see, can hurt you as well as create a false sense of confidence," he pointed out. "Often, drivers familiar with the road ahead of them, assume conditions are safe to cross, even though floodwaters hide roadbed erosion which has occurred during the flood.

"Another major contributor to these avoidable fatalities is overconfidence by the driver in a vehicle's ability to withstand the force exerted by floodwaters," he added. "Most people don't know that as little as six inches of water can cause drivers to lose control of their vehicles, and two feet of water will sweep most cars off the road."

Take these driving tips:

- Be especially careful at night. Darkness greatly increases the vulnerability of a driver to hidden dangers.
- Don't drive too fast through low-water crossings. It may cause a vehicle to hydroplane and lose contact with the road surface.
- Heed all flood and flash flood watches and warnings.
- Keep informed through the news media concerning road conditions.

To promote awareness, the National Weather Service Office of Hydrology has produced an excellent video featuring a 30-second public service announcement and an eight-minute documentary on the hidden dangers of low-water crossings. The video, which has been selected by the

American Automobile Association as the centerpiece of its spring 1997 safety campaign, is an excellent tool for use in presentations to local civic groups, high schools and beginning drivers.

For more information, call Larry Wenzel at (301) 713-0006, Extension 147. The video may be ordered by mailing a check or money order for \$3.50 (which covers postage and handling) payable to NOAA/NWS at the following address:

Larry Wenzel
NWS Office of Hydrology
SSMC-2, Room 8115
1325 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

NFIP Coordinator Ken Morris, right, discusses important program issues with Hank Elling of the Lawton Office. They are standing in front of the Oklahoma Floodplain Management Association exhibit at the Governor's Water Conference in Oklahoma City in November.

Managers' Meeting Set

The Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM) will hold its annual meeting in Little Rock April 28 - May 2, 1997.

The agenda will focus on floodplain management in a multifaceted world. Plenary sessions will include discussions by national and international authorities of relationships between the elements of floodplain management and potential directions for relevant state and federal programs and policies. Concurrent sessions will provide an opportunity for attendees to interact with speakers and fellow conferees on important floodplain management issues.

Alison Nicholson, with the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission, who is coordinating the event, has asked members of the Oklahoma Floodplain Managers Association (OFMA) to assist with break-out sessions and audio/visual needs.

For more information on the conference, contact Diane Watson, of the ASFPM, at (608) 274-0123.



Don't Drive into Floodwaters and Other NFIP Coordinator's Notes

Report from Ken Morris, Oklahoma NFIP Coordinator

Since the last Flood Current (September-October, 1996, several events of importance have occurred

The Oklahoma Floodplain Management Association Annual Conference on September 11-13 was a huge success. The highlight was the first step in development of a state floodplain manager's certification program.

The primary goal of this program is to increase the effectiveness of local officials in community floodplain management. Pat Hoggard, City of Tulsa, was appointed to chair the committee charged with study and implementation of the program. Pat pledged to have the program up and running by the next OFMA conference, September 10-13, 1997 at Roman Nose State Lodge.

September flooding claimed 5 lives; 4 of them on flooded roads

On September 26 and 27, isolated flooding events in northeast Oklahoma resulted in the tragic drowning deaths of five citizens, four of these related to driving through flooded road crossings. This brings me to a point that the OWRB and other state, federal and local floodplain management officials cannot stress enough -- Don't drive into floodwaters! We ask local officials to publicize this growing problem and to prevent future flooding deaths by placing permanent warning signs at all low-water crossings. The OWRB and FEMA feel so strongly about this that we have cooperated to place 18 billboards warning of the dangers of floodwaters in flood-prone areas in the Oklahoma City area. Our New Year's resolution for 1997 is to prevent all such fatalities. However, it will require all of us to be conscientious in our efforts to warn citizens of this frequent and widespread problem. The accompanying article in this issue of the Flood Current contains valuable information for you.

In November, Donnetta Blanlot and I hosted a floodplain management information booth at the Southwest Construction Code Council Conference in Oklahoma City. The conference,

which was attended by members of the NFIP and Oklahoma Floodplain Management Association, allowed us to recruit new members and pass on flood-related information to our building code enforcement colleagues. At the SWCCC's business meeting, we discussed development of a standing cadre of inspectors to determine "substantial damage" to structures in flooding and other disasters. To date, Florida is the only state to have an organization of this type in place. Dedicated funding for the group (travel, food, lodging, etc.) would likely be enabled with a memorandum of understanding between FEMA and the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management. We are working on the first draft of this MOU.

The First Quarter meeting of FEMA Region VI representatives December 5-6 in Denton, Texas, focused on another significant issue. Currently, the purchase of flood insurance is allowed, even though a builder or developer fails to obtain the floodplain permit from the NFIP participating community. Because there has been widespread support in the region to require a copy of the permit upon request for insurance, Region VI staff have proposed this new requirement to FEMA and FIA officials in Washington, D.C. The five states will first ratify the critical amendment.

Workshops Scheduled in April

The OWRB and FEMA announce dates of annual workshops for Oklahoma floodplain administrators.

The goal of the one-day workshops is to educate local officials on floodplain management. Specifically, sessions will focus on determining base flood elevations and administering the permitting system and Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance.

Workshop dates and locations are:
April 8 - Checotah Fountainhead Lodge

April 10 - Norman Public Library

April 15 - Bartlesville - TBA

April 17 - Altus - TBA

For information or to register, please call the OWRB at (405)530-8800.

Rules Hearings Scheduled

Executive Director Gary Sherrer invited citizens throughout the state to join the OWRB in its rulemaking process by attending meetings and commenting on proposals. All meetings are scheduled at 7 p.m. in the following locations:

Guymon - January 23, Texas Co. Activity Center, 5th & Sunset

Oklahoma City - January 27, OWRB Offices, 3800 N. Classen Blvd.

Woodward - February 3, Northwest Electric Co-Op, 2925 Williams Avenue

Lawton - February 4, Great Plains Area Vo-Tech, Rm. 301A, 4500 SW Lee Blvd.

McAlester - February 5, First National Bank Conference Center, 3rd & Choctaw

Tulsa - February 6, University Center at Tulsa, Rm. 153, 700 N. Greenwood

The OWRB and FEMA have cooperated in placing highly visible billboard warnings at low-water zones throughout the Oklahoma City area.

