

April 19, 2005

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,
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***Governor Declares May
Flood Awareness Month***

OKLAHOMA CITY -- Because spring marks the unofficial beginning of the state's flood season and to make citizens aware of flooding problems and solutions, Governor Brad Henry has designated May as "Flood Awareness Month" in Oklahoma.

"We remind citizens that heavy rains and severe storms typically occur in the early spring months, making this one of the most dangerous times of the year," says Duane Smith, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board (OWRB).

"This proclamation will be of tremendous help to the Water Board in educating the public on flood safety procedures and floodplain management techniques," Smith adds. Earlier, Governor Henry proclaimed March as "Flood Insurance Month," part of a state campaign to spread the word about the availability of affordable flood insurance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Oklahoma currently boasts 374 NFIP member communities, which consist of municipalities, counties, and tribes.

"Severe flooding episodes occur in Oklahoma virtually every year, most frequently in the spring and fall," says Mike Mathis, State Floodplain Manager. "Implementation of sound floodplain management and building strategies, particularly through the NFIP, is the most effective way for communities to avert potential flood damages." However, he encourages communities to go "above and beyond" minimum NFIP standards, consistent with the national Association of State Floodplain Manager's ongoing 'No Adverse Impact' initiative. Mathis points out that 89% of homes in Oklahoma's designated floodplains have no flood insurance.

On an individual basis, Mathis reminds Oklahomans of the dangers of driving into floodwaters. "Almost one-half of all flood-related fatalities occur in vehicles, primarily when people drive into flooded highway dips or low drainage areas at night. As little as six inches of water can cause drivers to lose control of their vehicles. Two feet of water will sweep most cars off the road," he says.

As an integral part of Oklahoma's spring flood awareness campaign, the OWRB is sponsoring – ten one-day workshops (5-101 workshops and 5-202 workshops) throughout the state to update city, county and tribal floodplain administrators on NFIP compliance requirements and provide assistance in the development, administration and enforcement of local floodplain management regulations that guide floodplain development. The 202 workshops are provided for the first time this year to assist the professional development of floodplain managers. The Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM) exam will be offered to pre-approved candidates at the close of each training day. There is no registration fee for the workshops, which feature speakers from the OWRB, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and RD Flanagan & Associates.

"Training is the key," Mathis adds. "I want to impress upon city and county officials the importance of regular training, at least annually. These educational opportunities not only help floodplain administrators better enforce local ordinances, they build confidence."

Sessions are scheduled for:

May 3

Bartlesville

Tri County Technology Center
6101 SE Nowata Road

May 12

McAlester

Eastern Okla. State College, Room 109
1802 E. College Avenue

May 5

Woodward

High Plains Institute of Technology
3921 34th St.

May 17

Midwest City

Midwest City Community Center
NE Corner of Midwest & Reno

May 10

Lawton

Lawton Public Library
110 SW 4th

The OWRB also works closely with the Oklahoma Insurance Department (OID) to educate state property/casualty agents and adjusters on NFIP rules and procedures. Because the Water Board's workshops are accredited by the OID, agents and adjusters can earn up to six continuing education credits for attending at least one workshop every two years. Also, the Oklahoma Real Estate Commission will provide continuing education credits for the floodplain management 101 workshops for Real Estate Professionals who complete the appropriate forms available from their web site.

For more information on Flood Awareness Month, the spring workshops or the National Flood Insurance Program, call Mike Mathis at 405/530-8800.

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