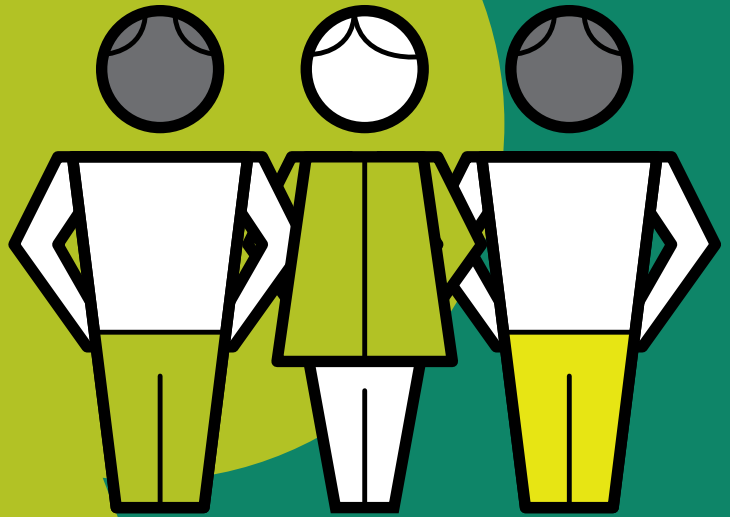




Guides for Community  
Emergency Volunteers



# Flood Volunteer Training Part 2

Flood risk awareness



Environment  
Agency



Cornwall Community  
Flood Forum



**COMMUNITY**  
FUND



**CHANGING PLACES**  
**CHANGING LIVES**



***Business training solutions***

THE CORNWALL COLLEGE GROUP

# Contents

---

## Introduction

Aims and objectives	5
Who is this guidance for?	6
The emergency services and you	7

---

## The dangers of flood water

Flood water	8
Drowning	9
Submerged hazards	9
Emergency exit routes	10
Rivers can be dangerous	10
The dangers of contaminated water	11
Equipment	12
The dangers of unblocking drains	13
Electricity and flood water	14
Gas and flood water	15

---

---

## Personal safety

Hypothermia	16
Slips, trips and falls	18
Vulnerable structures	18
Falling hazards	19
Reaction to flooding	19
Animals and livestock	20
Remain aware	20
Alcohol	21

---

## Flooding and public roads

Traffic	22
Vehicles and machinery	22
Flood warning signs and road closures	23
Driving	23
Driving in flood water	24

---

## Other important considerations


Managing sensitive information	25
Tourists and visitors	26
The press and the media	26
Criminal activity	26
Property protection products	27
Door-to-door information distribution	27
Test exercises	27
Summary	28
Data protection	30
Notes	31

# Introduction

## Aims and objectives

By the end of this module you will have:

- Information that will help you to carry out your role as a community volunteer in a safe and responsible way.
- An awareness and understanding of potential risks both to yourself and others before, during and after a flood event.
- Guidance on how to minimise exposure to those risks.
- A knowledge of how you can be better prepared to provide support and guidance to your community when needed without compromising your well-being or that of others.




Your first priority  
is your own safety  
and that of others  
around you.

# Who is this guidance for?

- This guidance is intended for any town or parish council, community group or business that is planning ahead of a flood event.
- While the focus is on community volunteers, this guidance is equally relevant to individuals and households that may be considered at risk of flooding.
- It will give you an awareness of the risks you may face during a flood. The basic principles of safety and well-being apply to everyone.

# The emergency services and you

- During a flood you should always follow the advice and guidance of the emergency services.
- Do not attempt to enter areas that have been cordoned off by the emergency services.
- If the emergency services tell you to evacuate from an area, you should follow that advice.
- Remember that your role is to assist the community, not to carry out the job of the emergency services.
- If the emergency services are at the scene, the coordinator needs to tell them what they need to know and what your role is, and let them proceed unhindered.



Always assess the risks to yourself and others before carrying out any activities as a volunteer.

# The dangers of flood water

## Flood water

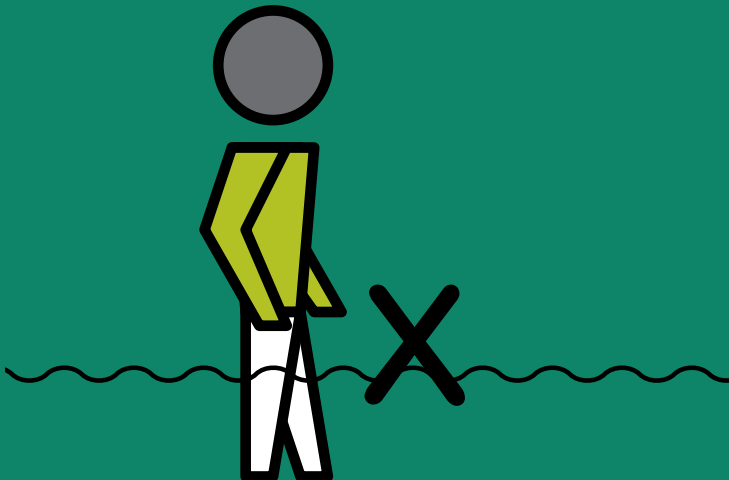
The definition of flood:

“Any case where land not normally covered by water becomes covered by water”.

You should be able to carry out your role as a community volunteer without the need to enter flood water.

Remember, flood water poses a significant risk to your safety. It is important that you assess the risks you may face at all times.

- **DO NOT** walk or drive through flood water.
- Leave certain activities to members of the emergency services who are trained and equipped to work in these conditions.





# Drowning

A common misconception is that drowning can only occur in deep water. A person can drown in just an inch of water and it can take only 15cm (6 inches) of flowing water to sweep an adult off their feet. If you fell over in such conditions, it is unlikely you would be able to stand up again.



**DO NOT** walk through flood water

# Submerged hazards

Even if the flood water is just a few inches deep, it is likely that it will carry mud and silt and you will not be able to clearly see what lies beneath.

The pressure of water in drains can lift and displace manhole covers. In fact, many drain covers are designed to lift if the pressure within the drain gets too great. Uncovered drains and displaced lids present trip hazards.

Flood water is powerful enough to carry large items of debris such as rocks, branches and litter. Again, these submerged hazards pose a great risk to your safety.

## What can you do?

- Be alert to kerbs and steps that may be hidden by flood water.
- Always ensure you can see the surface you are walking on.
- A stout stick can be used as an aid to balance and to probe shallow water.

## Emergency exit routes

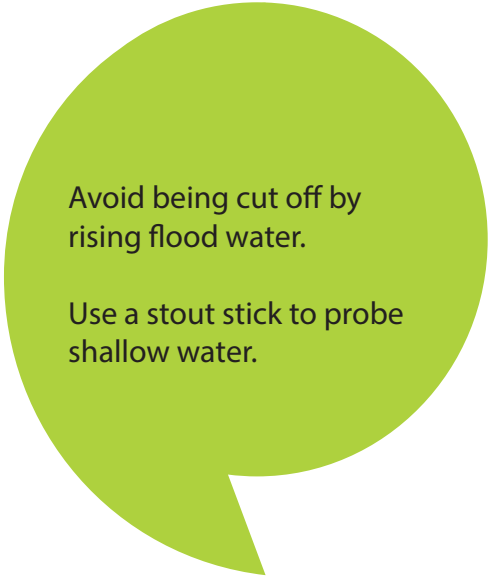
Flooding may occur long after rainfall has ceased and conditions may change unexpectedly, so remember that there may be a lag between rainfall and peak flood levels.

- Be mindful to look and listen and continually assess the situation as it develops around you.
- Avoid being trapped or cut off if flood waters rise unexpectedly.
- Always consider an exit route and a safe location to retreat to if necessary.
- Do not attempt to enter deep water.

## Rivers can be dangerous

Even when there is not a flood, rivers, streams, lakes and reservoirs can be dangerous under normal conditions:

“Water may look harmless, but it can hide strong flows. Water can be deep and powerful, especially near weirs and sluices. Always be aware of the risk of possible injury or even death when around water”.  
(Environment Agency)



Avoid being cut off by rising flood water.

Use a stout stick to probe shallow water.

# The dangers of contaminated water



Urban flood water typically carries 20 to 30 different diseases, especially if drains have backwashed and if sewerage is present.

In rural areas contamination is more likely to come from agricultural chemicals and animal waste.

There are two types of leptospirosis infection that can affect people in the UK:

- Weil's disease is a serious and sometimes fatal infection that is transmitted to humans by contact with urine from infected rats.
- The hardjo form of leptospirosis is transmitted from cattle to humans.

Exposure to rats, rat or cattle urine or to foetal fluids from cattle presents the highest risk. Farmers are the main group affected by this disease but anyone in contact with canal and river water is also potentially at risk. Leptospirosis is much less severe if treated promptly.

- Cover all cuts and broken skin with waterproof plasters before and during your duties. Protecting your hands can prevent infection.
- Wash your hands in clean fresh water after handling any animal or coming into contact with flood water and always before eating, drinking or smoking.
- Carry an antibacterial hand wash and treat your hands regularly if you come into contact with flood water.
- Seek medical advice immediately if you or anyone else is affected by diarrhoea, fever or abdominal pain.

# Equipment

After a flood, equipment such as footwear, high visibility clothing and gloves may become contaminated with sewage and pollutants.

- Wash all items thoroughly before they are used again.
- Any items that may have been contaminated should be stored so that contamination cannot spread to other items and should not be used again until they have been thoroughly cleaned.

Items that have been contaminated and cannot be cleaned to an acceptable standard should be disposed of. Contact your local authority for advice on safe and proper disposal.



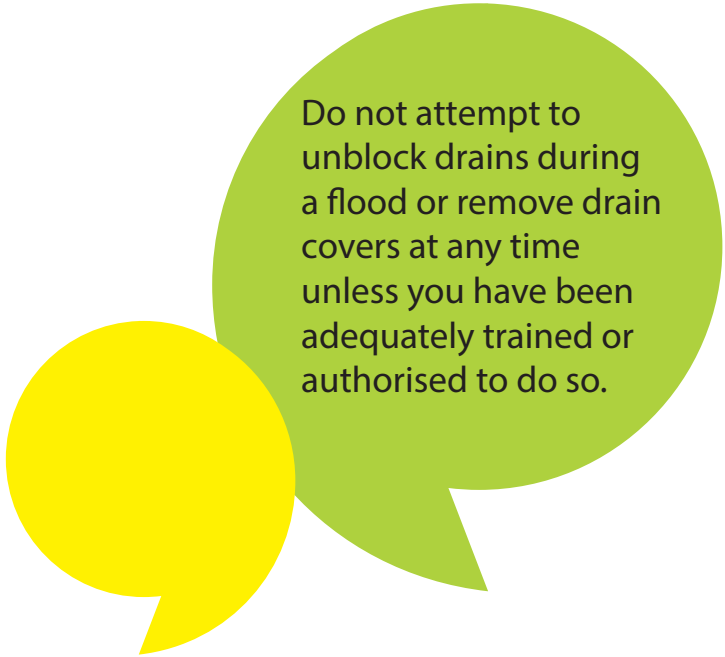
Wash your hands after contact with flood water, especially before eating or drinking.

# The dangers of unblocking drains

By attempting to unblock a drain during a flood you could:

- Be placing yourself at risk due to the suction effect that happens when a drain is unblocked. This could well cause you to become trapped.
- Also inadvertently cause damage to the drain, introduce material that could contribute to the blocking or simply cause the blockage to shift further along the drainage system.

Do not attempt to unblock drains during a flood or remove drain covers at any time unless you have been trained or authorised to do so. Refer any blocked drains to the appropriate local authority.



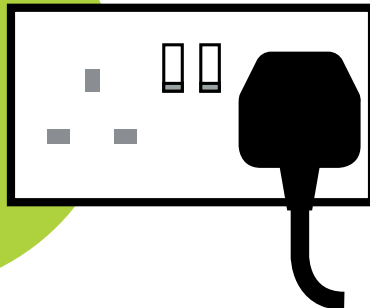
Do not attempt to unblock drains during a flood or remove drain covers at any time unless you have been adequately trained or authorised to do so.

# Electricity and flood water

After flooding, electrical hazards may exist long after the water dissipates. To maintain your safety and that of others remember the following:

- Look out for fallen power lines.
- Do not enter flooded areas or touch electrical equipment if the ground is wet unless you are certain the power is off.
- Never assume any part of a flooded electrical installation or appliance is safe.
- If water has been present anywhere near electrical circuits and electrical equipment, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel.
- Do not turn the power back on until it has been inspected by a qualified electrician.
- Do not turn on any electrical equipment if it has been underwater until it has been inspected by a qualified electrician. These items may work and appear safe but once they have been underwater, they could cause electrocution or fire.

Do not turn the power back on until it has been inspected by a qualified electrician.



# Gas and flood water

Flood water can damage the controls of gas appliances. Safety features can become blocked, even if the gas controls appear to operate properly.


- If you suspect a gas leak: don't light a match, avoid using any electrical appliance, do not turn lights on or off, or use a phone, as these electrical items may produce a spark.
- Check for gas leaks. If you smell gas or hear gas escaping, turn off the main gas valve, open windows, leave the area immediately, and report the leak when safe to do so. Ensure any works are carried out by a qualified gas engineer.

# Hypothermia

Hypothermia is a condition in which the normal body temperature of 37°C (98.6°F) drops below 35°C (95°F).

Whilst hypothermia is most common in cold environments, it is also possible to get it in mild weather. For example, if you get soaked in a rain shower and do not dry off properly soon afterwards. Water evaporating from your skin reduces your body temperature.

- Make sure you're dressed appropriately before you go outside.
- Wear layers of clothing to trap air, this will help to keep you warm (tightly woven and waterproof clothes are best).
- Drink plenty of fluids and hot drinks (not alcohol) and eat regular, balanced meals to give you energy.
- If you show signs of hypothermia, stop what you are doing and seek medical attention.
- Listen to the advice of others as they may identify the signs of hypothermia before you do.



Be alert for signs of hypothermia in yourself and others.



## Signs of mild hypothermia:

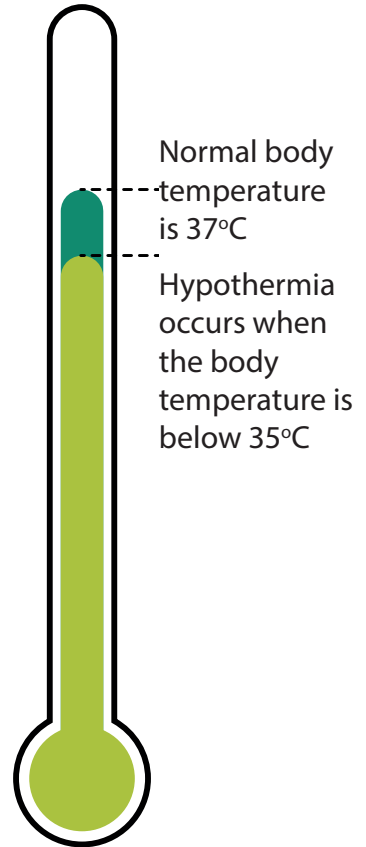
- Shivering.
- Feeling cold.
- Low energy.
- Cold, pale skin.

## Signs of moderate hypothermia:

- Violent, uncontrollable shivering.
- Being unable to think or pay attention.
- Confusion (some people don't realise they are affected).
- Loss of judgement and reasoning.
- Difficulty moving around or stumbling (weakness).
- Fumbling hands and loss of co-ordination.
- Drowsiness.
- Slurred speech.
- Listlessness and indifference.
- Slow, shallow breathing and a weak pulse.

## Signs of severe hypothermia:

- Loss of control of hands, feet, and limbs.
- Uncontrollable shivering that suddenly stops.
- Unconsciousness.
- Shallow or no breathing.
- Weak, irregular or no pulse.
- Stiff muscles.
- Dilated pupils.



## Slips, trips and falls

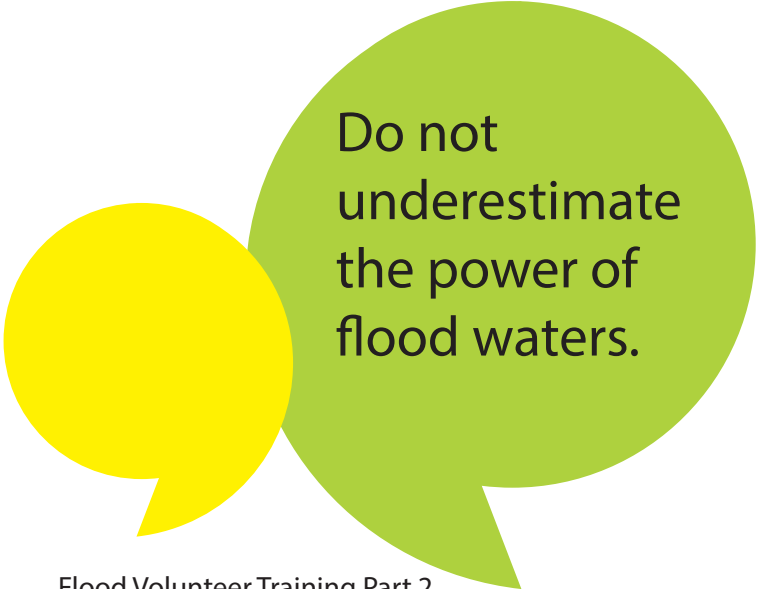
During and after a flood event the area around you will be wet, slippery and probably contain mud and debris.

Avoid walking in these conditions if possible but if you must, then do take extra care. Always wear sturdy, appropriate footwear.

## Vulnerable structures

Never underestimate the power of flood waters. Damage may be caused to buildings, roads, river banks and other structures, making them unsafe.

Do not stand on or near anything that may be vulnerable to damage and collapse due to flood waters, such as bridges and river banks, when water levels are high.



Do not underestimate the power of flood waters.

## Falling hazards

Flood events may be associated with stormy conditions with high wind speeds, so:

- Be aware of falling hazards caused by high wind speeds, for example roofing tiles, trees and branches.
- You must continually assess the risk to yourself at all times.
- Do not walk or stand beneath, or close to, trees or buildings during high winds.

If you believe weather conditions pose a threat to your safety and well-being do not proceed with your activities as a community volunteer and exit the area.

## Reaction to flooding

Be aware that at times of flooding, people may behave differently due to stress. This can be in the form of irrational and sometimes aggressive behaviour.

If you are confronted with aggressive people, do not put yourself at risk. If they need emergency assistance, contact the emergency services.

# Animals and livestock

Domestic pets and farm livestock may display dangerous and unpredictable behaviour, especially if under stress.

- Do not approach animals unless you consider it is safe to do so. If you are unsure, contact a member of the emergency services or the local authority dog warden.

# Remain aware

During an incident it is easy to become “task-focussed”, concentrating so much on what you are doing that you forget about your own safety or that of others.

- Stop your activities regularly to take the time to assess your own safety and that of others around you so that you remain aware.



# Alcohol

Due to the fact that flooding can occur at any time without prior warning, it is possible that this can happen at a time when you have been drinking alcohol.



## It is important to remember that:

- Alcohol can impair your judgement and your ability to make decisions, which in turn could lead to you placing yourself or others at greater risk.
- No matter what the situation, it is still illegal to drive a vehicle whilst under the influence of alcohol.
- Alcohol can lower your body temperature, making you more vulnerable to hypothermia.

Even if you have stopped drinking, alcohol may remain in your system for some time afterwards and continue to have an effect on you.

## In terms of your role as a community volunteer:

- Do not drink alcohol if you have received a flood warning and there is a possibility that you may be required to act as a community volunteer.
- Do not carry out the role of a community volunteer if you have been drinking.

# Flooding and public roads

## Traffic

During a flood people can become distressed and distracted and may not be concentrating on their driving and the road ahead. Additionally, poor driving conditions and decreased visibility in bad weather will often exacerbate this problem. For these reasons you should take extra care with regards to vehicles and machinery at times of flood.

Avoid walking or standing on, or close to, a road with passing traffic. Even on a pavement you may be vulnerable to being struck by a vehicle. Always stand a safe distance away from moving traffic.

## Vehicles and machinery

During a flood vehicles and heavy machinery such as road sweepers, diggers and trucks may be operating in the area.

Be alert at all times and stand clear of any working vehicles or machinery.

# Flood warning signs and road closures,

By ignoring flood warning signs and attempting to drive along roads that have already flooded, there is a risk that drivers could lose control of their vehicles, posing a risk to themselves and others.

Vehicles attempting to drive through flood waters can cause displacement and push waves of water towards nearby properties, possibly exacerbating the problem of flooding.

When roads have to be closed due to flooding, the responsibility for this lies with the Police.

## **As a Community Emergency Volunteer:**

You should not put yourself at risk by attempting to stop traffic. If you are concerned about traffic contact the duty highways engineer or in an emergency contact the police.

## Driving

When driving during or after heavy rainfall:

- Be alert to the presence of standing water and the risk of aquaplaning.
- Drive at a safe and responsible speed.
- Remember, the usual speed restrictions and laws still apply.

## Key points

- Be aware of vehicles and machinery operating in the area
- Always drive at a safe and responsible speed
- Do not attempt to drive through flooded roads or fords

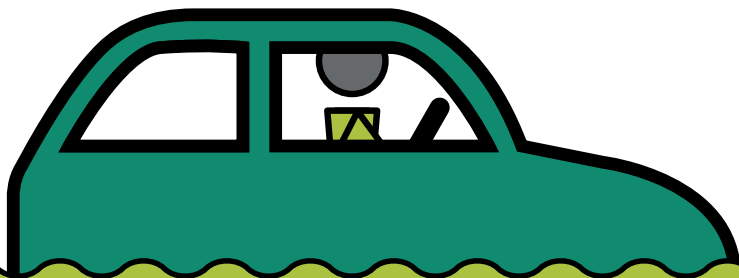
# The dangers of driving in flood water

Nearly a third of all flood related deaths are by drowning in a vehicle. It only takes 60cm or 2 feet of standing water to float a vehicle. This includes 4x4s, vans and lorries.

Just 30cm or 1 foot of fast flowing water could be enough to move the average family car.

Only an egg cupful of water in the combustion chamber could be enough to wreck an engine, so there is a risk of your engine cutting out and you becoming stranded if you drive through flood water.

- Do not drive on any roads that have been closed by the emergency services.
- Do not attempt to recover a vehicle yourself if water has reached inside.
- Make sure someone else knows your travel plans.





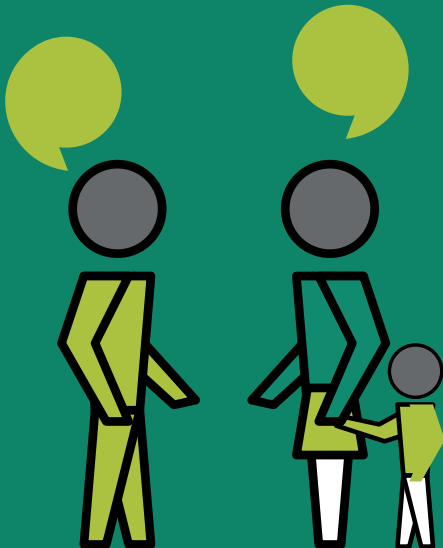
# Other important considerations

## Managing sensitive information

Your local knowledge will be one of your key strengths as a community volunteer. Through your activities you are encouraged to get to know your community.

Identify households and individuals who will need priority attention during a flood event such as the elderly, less able, and even families with young children. Some information about who these people are will be stored on the community flood plan; as such it is essential that you manage this sensitive information responsibly.

Information relating to individuals or specific households or businesses must not, under any circumstances, be passed onto anyone other than members of the emergency services during a flood.



## Tourists and visitors

Tourists and holiday makers may be living within your local area; remember that their knowledge of the area may be limited and some may not speak or understand English.

Do not assume everyone has understood your instructions. Some people may require extra guidance.

## The press and media

A flood event may attract local and national press and media attention. Reporters may ask you to comment on the situation and ask for your personal reaction to the event.

It is best that you do not comment to the press or media. Direct members of the press or media to contact your group co-ordinator who will act as the designated spokesperson.

## Criminal activity

Be alert to the possibility of criminal activity during or after a flood event. Individuals may take the opportunity to cause damage to property or take possessions from homes or businesses.

If you witness such activity do not approach or tackle the individuals yourself but inform the police when it is safe to do so.

# Property protection products

Many households and businesses within the community may have their own flood protection products.

It is important that you as a community volunteer do not try to install these for anyone unless you have received the appropriate training and authorisation from the property owner.

# Door-to-door information distribution

As a community volunteer you may have to relay information to your community. A common approach to doing this is to hand out leaflets or newsletters to each household. Good practice is to:

- Wear a clean high visibility vest or jacket.
- Work in pairs or small groups.
- Always maintain visual contact with others.
- Let someone else know what you will be doing and where.
- Avoid the risk of dog bites, do not put your hand through letterboxes.
- Only carry out this type of activity in daylight conditions.
- Take extra care while walking on wet slippery surfaces.
- Remember to leave premises as you find them, close gates etc.

# Test exercises

As major flood events can be rare it is important that you maintain your knowledge and skills by conducting test exercises and repeat training on a regular basis. Communities Prepared can assist you in planning for these. See our online hub for more details.

# Summary

## Your priorities

Your first priority is your own safety and that of others around you. Always assess the risks to yourself and others before undertaking any activities as a volunteer.

## The emergency services

- Always follow the advice and guidance of the emergency services.
- Please remember that you are not part of the paid emergency services and you should not place yourself in danger in any way.
- If you are told by the emergency services to evacuate from an area you should follow that advice.



## Your personal safety:

- Avoid walking through flood water.
- Be aware of rising flood water to avoid being cut off.
- Use a stout stick to probe shallow water.
- After contact with flood water always wash your hands, especially before eating or drinking.
- Always work in pairs or small groups, maintaining visual contact at all times. Do not work alone.
- Wear high visibility clothing.
- Inform someone, such as your group co-ordinator of your activities.
- Be alert for signs of hypothermia in yourself and others.
- Avoid standing on or near anything that may be vulnerable to damage and collapse due to flood waters, e.g. bridges and river banks, when water levels are high.
- Do not attempt to unblock drains or culverts.
- If you believe weather conditions pose a threat to your safety and well-being, stop carrying out your community volunteer activities and exit the area.

## Flooding and road safety:

- Do not attempt to drive through flooded roads or fords.
- Be alert at all times and stand clear of any working vehicles or machinery.
- Do not place yourself at risk by attempting to stop traffic directly.

# Data protection

Information relating to individuals or specific households or businesses must not, under any circumstances, be passed onto any other persons. Such information is only to be shared with members of the emergency services during a flood event.



# Notes

The overall aim of this guide is to provide you with information that will help you carry out your role as a community volunteer in a safe and responsible way.

This information pack is intended as a guide only. Whilst the information it contains is believed to be correct, we can take no responsibility for actions taken based on the information contained in this pack.

Other booklets in this series:



Contact us:



[communitiesprepared.org.uk](http://communitiesprepared.org.uk)



[communitiesprepared@groundwork.org.uk](mailto:communitiesprepared@groundwork.org.uk)



0117 910 3930



@CommunitiesPrep



@CommunitiesPrepared

