

STATE OF COLORADO

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Department of Natural Resources

1313 Sherman Street, Room 721
Denver, Colorado 80203
Phone: (303) 866-3441
FAX: (303) 866-4474
www.cwcb.state.co.us



News Release

March 23, 2007
For Immediate Release

News contact: Kevin Houck
Phone: (303) 866-4805

Bill Ritter, Jr.
Governor

Harris D. Sherman
Executive Director

Rod Kuharich
CWCB Director

Dan McAuliffe
Deputy Director

2007 FLOOD SEASON IS APPROACHING

The State of Colorado experiences 100-year floods each and every year. Spring flood season will soon revisit the citizens of Colorado, prompting the Colorado Water Conservation Board to issue its annual reminder that individuals and business owners should consider, be aware of, prepare for, and insure against flood threats. The March 22, 2007 SNOTEL data provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, which estimates snowpacks for the major watersheds of Colorado, indicates that basin-wide snowpack for all major river basins is below average. However, individual smaller watersheds within these larger river basins are still reporting readings as high as 130% of average, indicating that localized snowmelt flooding is still a distinct possibility. In addition, if unforeseen climactic conditions, such as a very wet spring (as was experienced in 1995, for example), or a sudden sustained warming trend occurs (as was experienced on the Western Slope in 1984, for example), even below-average snowpack can create damaging flooding conditions.

It is also important to note that Colorado's worst flood events have historically occurred from spring rainfall and summer thunderstorms, which are completely unrelated to snowmelt flooding resulting from mountain snowpack. For this reason, even residents in areas with low snowpack should exercise caution in evaluating flood risk. These rain-induced flood events are of concern every year to floodplain managers as they are difficult to predict and often create flooding conditions with very little warning.

This year's flood season also poses increased risk to those properties located within and downstream of areas impacted by major wildfires that have occurred within the past several years, (e.g. Hayman Burn in Douglas County and surrounding areas). While the runoff characteristics of fire-ravaged watersheds will improve with each passing year, studies have indicated that it may take ten or more years for these watersheds to recover, especially from high intensity burns, which Colorado has experienced.

Property owners in high risk areas should be aware that for locations near watercourses, even minor rainstorms could bring streams out of their banks and cause flood-related damages. The most reliable protection against flood losses for property owners is flood insurance coverage. Most homeowner and casualty policies do not cover the peril of flood. Flooding may also occur during very high rain events outside of the identified 100-year floodplain. Based on historical information extending over 100 years, Colorado averages \$55 million (in 2007 dollars) annually in flood damages. You can purchase flood insurance at any time. However, there is a 30-day waiting period after you've applied and paid the premium before the policy is effective with very few exceptions. Because of this enforced waiting period, it is impossible to purchase flood insurance when the threat is imminent. **Therefore, now is the time to look into flood insurance so that the 30-day waiting period will be over and coverage will be in force during the peak flood season.**

Colorado currently has 17,581 flood insurance policies in force with coverage of \$3.52 billion (as of March 22, 2007). It is also important to be aware that mapped floodplains only represent areas subject to damage from the

100-year flood. Floods can and do exceed this extent, and therefore property owners outside of the mapped floodplains also should consider protecting themselves. Events in the Gulf Coast in recent years provided perfect examples of how even properties located outside of mapped 100-year floodplains can be damaged or destroyed. Flood insurance is a good investment because it is the best means for protecting your largest investment from flood loss. **Call your insurance agent today. For more information, or to find out if your community participates in the NFIP, contact the National Flood Insurance Program at 1-800-427-4661 for the names of local agents who handle flood insurance policies or contact your local insurance agent. You may also contact the Colorado Water Conservation Board at 303-866-3441 for additional assistance.**

Frequently asked questions about flood insurance:

Can I buy flood insurance in high risk areas? You can buy flood insurance no matter where you live in your community as long as your community belongs to the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). There are currently 235 cities, counties, and towns statewide that participate in the NFIP.

Can I buy flood insurance if I live outside of the 100-year floodplain? You can buy flood insurance no matter where you live in your community as long as your community belongs to the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). There are currently 235 cities, counties, and towns statewide that participate in the NFIP. Flood insurance is still available outside of mapped floodplains, and may be available for lower rates.

Does the 100-year flood event happen only once every 100 years? The 100-year flood event is a frequently misunderstood term. It indicates an event that has a 1% chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year. A 100-year flood could happen multiple times in one year, or it might not occur in 1,000 years. The term “100-year flood” simply refers to the expected probability of the event occurring based on the best available information.

Is federal disaster assistance available to damaged buildings without flood insurance? Every year around the country, many homeowners are dismayed to find out that federal disaster assistance falls well short of providing enough relief to cover costs from damages. Federal disaster assistance is only available in the event of a federally-declared disaster and, other than short-term living expenses, generally takes the form of low-interest loans, which must be paid back. While the damages to the Gulf Coast in 2005 made headlines regarding the availability of federal disaster assistance, property owners have experienced past flooding losses that could not be repaid. It should also be noted that while property damages have been recorded every year in Colorado, a federal disaster has not been declared since 1999. Flood insurance is the best way to protect your property from floods.

Doesn't my homeowners insurance cover flooding? Unfortunately, many homeowners do not find out until it is too late that their homeowner's policies don't cover flooding. Federal flood insurance protects your most valuable assets -- your home and belongings.

Is flood insurance only available to homeowners? Flood insurance is available to protect homes, condominiums, apartments and non-residential buildings, including commercial structures. See your insurance agent for limits of coverage for each.

If my property has been flooded previously, can I still buy flood insurance? It doesn't matter how many times your home, apartment or business has flooded. You are still eligible to purchase flood insurance, provided that your community is participating in the NFIP.

Is there any type of coverage for my basement under the NFIP? Basement coverage extends to cleanup expenses and items used to service the building, such as elevators, furnaces, hot water heaters, washers and dryers, air conditioners, freezers, utility connections, circuit breaker boxes, pumps, and tanks used in solar energy systems. **The policy does not cover belongings in a finished basement, nor any improvements to a basement, such as finished walls, floors and ceilings.**