

Avatar: The Effects of Floods and Their Risks

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The primary effect of floods is the damage they do to structures and buildings. These cars were buried under storm surge from a hurricane. Floods can cause physical damage to any structure in their path, often crushing buildings or leaving them so wet and dirty that they cannot be used ever again.

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Floods also affect people and animals. Both can die by drowning in flood waters, be swept away by fast-moving water, or get sick from waterborne diseases that often accompany floods. Diseases, such as cholera and typhus, are caused by contaminated water. When flood waters stick around for days and weeks before finally receding, more deaths by disease can occur than by drowning. Also, the collapse of structures due to damage by flood waters poses a threat to the people inside them.

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Flood water is almost always dirty and contaminated. A secondary effect of floods is that water is everywhere but none of it is fit for drinking. Clean drinking water becomes scarce, and unhygienic conditions lead to the spread of disease, as well as the proliferation of pests like mosquitoes and rodents. Disrupted sewage lines can also cause bacterial infections and contaminate drinking water supplies.

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Floods also cause loss of farmland, which can lead to food shortages. They can cause economic hardships for flood-hit areas. As costs mount to clean up and rebuild a city after a flood, so does the cost of food after crops have been destroyed. Thus, floods not only cause physical damage to an area, but can also bring economic hardship.

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Though floods are damaging and are America's number one natural disaster, they can occasionally be beneficial. Floods cover the land with alluvium deposits, which, as you may recall, is sediment that falls out of flowing water. This sediment includes fertile silt deposits that create rich farmland for growing crops. In fact, as you have learned, seasonal floods of the Nile River brought fertile soil to the otherwise desert environment, giving Ancient Egypt its start. Also, as floods spill out from waterways, they leave behind deposits along the banks of a stream that can build up with time. These deposits form natural levees that can hold back future flood waters.

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What should you do if you hear the weather reporter talk about a flood watch or a flood warning for your area? First of all, know the difference between a flood watch and a flood warning. A flood watch means that conditions are favorable for the development of a flood and that you should start preparing for the possibility of a flood. A flood warning means that the flood is already developing and already occurring, and that you need to seek immediate protection. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control have the following recommendations on how to be safe during and after a flood.