

Flood Action Week: Households urged to prepare in 2022 year of extremes

Communities are being urged to prepare for flooding this winter with the Environment Agency warning of “ignoring the danger at your own peril”.

Amid increased extreme weather events brought on by the climate emergency, the Environment Agency is launching an awareness campaign – Flood Action Week – to encourage those who live in areas at risk of flooding to act now to protect their home, possessions and family.

This year alone, the UK experienced its highest ever recorded temperatures, as the Met Office confirmed that England had its joint hottest summer on record with much of the country still struggling with drought.

Looking ahead to this winter, although the Met Office says the chance of wet and windy weather increases as we go through the season, unexpected flooding could occur at any time and communities are being warned not to be complacent following this summer’s dry weather.

Since 1998 we have seen six of the ten wettest years on record and this year for the first time ever saw three named storms in one week.

One of the key messages coming from COP27, which gets underway in Egypt this week, is that we must plan and prepare for increasingly extreme events.

As we have seen across the globe, the effects of climate change are becoming clearer, with wildfires raging across Europe; China experiencing its worst heatwave in decades; and devastating floods in Pakistan ripping through communities killing more than 1500 people and displacing millions.

This Flood Action Week (7 November – 13 November) the Environment Agency is urging people to take three simple steps:

Caroline Douglass, Executive Director of Flooding at the Environment Agency, said:

Climate change is happening now. We’re seeing more extreme weather – in this year alone with three named storms in a week, record-breaking temperatures and drought declared across large parts of the country.

“That is why it is vital that people take the necessary preparations as early as possible to prepare for the worst. Our recent investment programme has better protected 314,000 homes from flooding and we’re investing millions into keeping communities safe, but we can’t stop all flooding.

The message is clear – households risk ignoring the danger of

flooding at their own peril. Anyone can go online to check if they are at risk, sign up for Environment Agency warnings, and, most importantly, know what you need to do if flooding hits.

Floods Minister Rebecca Pow said:

I know how devastating flooding can be – the loss of your home, the financial stress, and the destruction of irreplaceable, sentimental belongings all place unbelievable strain on those affected.

Simple steps such as checking your flood risk online and signing up for flood warnings can make all the difference in terms of preparing yourself for what may come.

We are committed to pressing ahead with our record £5.2 billion investment in flood and coastal defences between 2021 and 2027 to ensure more communities are even better prepared for future flooding events.

This year's Flood Action Week comes as the Environment Agency has now expanded its flood warning service to reach almost 50,000 new properties at risk of flooding and hopes to exceed its target to provide new warning capability for 62,000 properties at risk of flooding by this winter. It brings the number of properties registered with the service to 1.6 million.

With over 250 mobile pumps and 5,000 trained staff across the country, the Environment Agency is ready to take action wherever it is needed this winter. The construction and repair of flood defences has also continued throughout the year as part of the record £5.2 billion government investment in flood and coastal defences.

These preparations have already helped to protect communities from flooding. During the storms earlier this year, despite some 400 properties sadly flooding, around 35,000 were protected by Environment Agency schemes.

Will Lang from the Met Office said:

Winters in the UK usually include a wide variety of weather, and this winter looks to be no exception.

Although we expect to see high pressure dominating our weather through much of the early winter, which increases the potential for cold spells, we could still see wet and windy weather at times.

The risk of unsettled weather increases as we head into 2023 with wet, windy, and mild spells a real possibility.

At least one in six people in England are at risk from flooding from rivers and the sea, with many more at risk from surface water flooding.

However nearly two in three households at risk of flooding don't believe it will happen to them, according to analysis produced by the Environment Agency earlier this year.

And despite the research showing that almost two thirds of people (60%) have taken at least one action to prepare for flooding, as many as 1.5 million households, who are at risk, are yet to prepare.

Those at risk are encouraged to follow the advice to 'Prepare. Act. Survive', specifically:

- If there is an initial flood alert – prepare by packing medicines and insurance and other important documents and visit the flood warning information service
- If there is a subsequent confirmed flood warning – act by moving family, pets and belongings to safety. Turn off gas, water and electricity
- If there is a severe flood warning – survive immediate danger by following the advice of emergency services or calling 999 if needed

With just 30cm of flowing water being enough to float a car, drivers are also being warned not to attempt to drive through flood water and take extra precautions in wet weather.

Tony Rich, from The AA said:

It's vital for drivers to be aware of the risks of driving in floodwater and during heavy rain. Roads can quickly become flooded, making your intended route impassable, so allow plenty of time for journeys. It's also important to leave more space than normal between you and the car in front to allow for greater stopping distances.

Drivers should take extra care where roads dip, especially under bridges as these are most likely to flood first. Flood water can be deceptively deep and can easily cause damage to your vehicle's bodywork or worse – the engine, often resulting in hefty repair bills.

Flood water can also mask other hazards in the road, such as displaced drain covers and potholes, so if in doubt turn around and find another route. Doing this may add time to your journey, but as it only takes 30cm of flowing water to float a car – it's better to be safe than sorry.