

Flooding

Stemming the flow of damage from a flood event

Whether it's caused by heavy rain, rising rivers or a significant storm, floods can cause significant damage to property and businesses. Because water can get just about everywhere during a flood, it can result in months of expensive repairs, limited or no access to your business, and loss of plant, stock and raw materials – not to mention the disruption to your business itself.



Plan ahead, come rain or shine

Having a plan in place can help limit the disruption and the distress caused by flooding. And there are a few simple steps you can take now to mitigate the damage to your business property, including:

- Having a business continuity plan that includes actions to get you back on your feet following an event like flooding – include a list of local companies who can help.
- Staying aware of any weather events that might affect your business or building. This allows you to check your premises and put precautions in place.
- Finding out if you are in a flood prone area. Your local civil defence emergency management office can help with this. It's also important to know if your building is above or below the flood stage water level. (This is where a body of water has risen to a level that causes sufficient inundation of areas that are not normally covered by water, causing a threat to life and property and inconvenience).
- Avoiding building on a flood plain.
- Getting to know your surrounds such as low-lying land, dammed gullies, roads, walls etc. These could present potential flood hazards. For flood prone areas, investigate and implement ways to create an outlet for pooled water.
- Include native plants when landscaping as they can help prevent soil erosion and allow water to drain more effectively.
- Constructing stop banks or flood walls to stop water from entering your building. You might need planning permission, so it always pays to check first.
- Having access to ready-made mobile flood barriers or other types of defences to help minimise damage, especially if you are in a flood prone area or there is a major event forecasted.



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Build your resilience

There are a number of ways you can make buildings more flood resilient. But it's worth bringing in an expert for their opinion. They'll often give you ideas specific to your situation. These ideas are worth considering:

- Install flood vents in foundation walls and other enclosed areas to allow water to flow through and drain away. This lowers the risk of structural damage.
- Use water resistant dry wall and insulation which minimises damage and is easily cleaned and sanitised.
- Use water resistant plaster and sealant on external walls and water resistant paint on internal walls. Install water resistant doors and window frames wherever possible.
- Seal gaps around door and window frames, air vents and where pipes or wiring enter the building to keep the water out.
- Ensure that ground water can't seep into the basement area. If that's not possible, think about installing drainage systems and waterproof membranes around the perimeter walls. Consider installing a sump pump.
- Lay tiles or use other water-resistant materials rather than carpets in areas likely to be affected by flood waters e.g. at ground level.
- Fit solid wood or plastic cabinets, as these are more resilient than MDF or chipboard units. It's wise to raise them off the ground on legs if possible.
- Install non-return valves in drainage pipes to prevent sewerage back-up into the building. Position electrical sockets at least 1.5m above floor level.
- Elevate important plant, equipment and building services such as heating or ventilation systems above typical flood levels and keep business records in a safe location – maybe even off site.
- Ensure external storage tanks are properly anchored and check water can drain away from them – especially if they contain hazardous substances.
- Seek specialist advice on ways to protect any wells from contamination if your business uses well water.
- Create a plan for providing back-up power to the site if necessary. It can be a huge advantage if you can get air conditioning systems working again as it can assist in reducing damage due to humidity, moisture and mould.

What to do if a flood looks likely

Even if you don't have a huge amount of time to prepare, make sure you get these essential basics sorted if a major rainfall event is on its way:

- Plug showers, baths, basins so that flood water doesn't enter the property through the drains or sewers.
- Move furniture, stock, plant to higher levels e.g. upstairs, high on racks or on shelves.
- Use sandbags to keep water away from the building.
- Turn off utilities such as electricity and gas supplies. Isolate the electrical supply to the building if possible or at least to critical plant. Unplug appliances, plant and office equipment where possible.
- Secure or relocate outside items that can be washed away or be swept into the building causing damage.

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