

## FLOOD HAZARD AREAS

Douglas County is comprised of several drainage basins that flow into the County's eastern border, the Chattahoochee River. The northern and eastern areas of Douglas County are in the Sweetwater Creek floodplain, and the southeastern portion of the county is in the Chattahoochee River floodplain.

Flooding from Sweetwater Creek occurs during periods of heavy rain. During a normal flood event, as little as 2-4 inches of rain in a 24 hour time period can jeopardize the creek's banks and overflows generally cause damage in the Austell and Lithia Springs areas. Due to geographical upstream conditions, flood crest often is not obtained for up to 48-72 hours after the rain event.

Flooding on the Chattahoochee River is normally a much slower event, and can be caused by rain as far north as Helen, GA as it makes its way down the river for eventual discharge into the Gulf of Mexico.

Various floods from both water bodies have hit Douglas County in recent memory. In the 1916 floodwaters from Sweetwater Creek crested at 20.0 feet above flood stage. In the 2005, floods from the Sweetwater Creek reached new record high of 21.8' after two tropical storms combined producing up to 10" of rain in only 48 hours. Damage was estimated at \$6,000,000.

Information on whether your property is in the 100-year floodplain can be obtained by coming into the Development Services office and having the Engineering Dept. help you. Maps are available to look at as well as other flood-related information. Contact the Engineering Dept. at (770) 920-7242 for further assistance.

## FLOOD SAFETY

The following common sense guidelines can help you from the dangers of flooding:

- Do not drive through a flooded area. More people drown in cars than any where else. Do not drive around barriers.
- Do not walk through flowing water. Currents can be deceptive. Six inches of water can knock you off your feet.

## Douglas County FLOOD INFORMATION

- Stay away from power lines and electrical wires. If your house is about to be flooded, turn off the power at the service box. Electrical current can travel through water. Electrocutation is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death during floods.
- Be alert to gas leaks. Turn off the gas to your house before it floods. If you smell gas, report it to a Village official or your gas company. Do not use candles, lanterns or open flames if you smell gas or are unsure if your gas has been shut off.
- Keep children away from the flood waters, ditches, culverts and storm drains. Flood waters can carry unimaginable items that have dislodged themselves. Culverts may suck smaller people into them rendering them helpless.
- Clean everything that has been wet. Flood water will be contaminated with sewage and other chemicals which pose severe health threats.
- Look out for animals, especially snakes. Small animals that have been flooded out of their home may seek shelter in yours.
- Do not use gas engines, such as generators, or charcoal fires indoors during power outages. Carbon monoxide exhaust can pose serious health hazards.

## PROPERTY PROTECTION MEASURES

If your property is susceptible to flooding, there are many flood damage reduction measures you can employ.

- Watertight seals can be applied to brick and block

- walls to protect against low-level flooding.
- Utilities such as heating and air conditioning systems, water heaters and other major appliances can be elevated to higher floors in the structure or on raised platforms.
- Temporary measures such as moving furniture and other valuables to higher floors or sandbagging exterior openings will also help.
- Elevating or relocating the entire structure may also be a feasible option.

## FLOODPLAIN PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

All development within the 100-yr. floodplain (not just construction of buildings, but filling, excavation, fences, etc.) is required to obtain a Douglas County Development Permit and all elevation certifications submitted are retained on file. Applications must be made prior to doing any work in a floodplain area. Please contact the Douglas County Development Services Dept. to receive all the information you will need in order to properly develop in the floodplain at (770) 920-7242. You may report any illegal development activities to the above number as well.

## SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENT/DAMAGE

The NFIP requires that if the cost of improvements to a building or the cost to repair damages (from any cause) to a building exceeds 50% of the market value of the building (excluding land value), the entire building must be brought up to current floodplain management standards. Building improvement projects include exterior and interior remodeling, rehabilitation, additions and repair and reconstruction projects. Additionally, the cost of currently planned improvements will be added to the cost of previously made improvements and compared to the existing market value to determine if the improvements exceed 50% of the structure's value. Please contact the Engineering Dept. at (770) 920-7242 for further information.

## FLOOD INSURANCE

If you do not have flood insurance, talk to your insurance agent. Most homeowner's insurance policies do not cover damage from floods. Flood insurance is only available to those participating communities in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Because of our floodplain management programs that attempt to protect us from the multiple flooding hazards, Douglas County is part of the NFIP and thus, residents are able to obtain flood insurance. Additionally, because Douglas County participates in FEMA's CRS program, flood insurance premiums are discounted.

Be sure to check your policy to ensure you have adequate coverage. Usually these policies cover the building structure, but not the contents. Contents coverage can also be obtained by asking. There is a 30-day waiting period before flood insurance coverage becomes effective. Plan ahead; do not wait until a flood is predicted before purchasing flood insurance.

If you are building inside the floodplain, the purchase of flood insurance is mandatory if using a federally regulated/insured bank for a loan.

## NATURAL & BENEFICIAL FUNCTIONS

Floodplains play a valuable role in providing natural and beneficial functions to the area around, and including, Douglas County. Floodplains that are relatively undisturbed provide a wide range of benefits to both human and natural systems. These benefits provide aesthetic pleasure as well as function to provide active processes such as filtering nutrients. Parts of both the Sweetwater Creek and Chattahoochee River floodplain are used as a means to filter farm chemical run-off so that these areas can maintain bio-diversity and ecosystem sustainability. Both floodplains contain historic and archeological sites that provide opportunity for education and study. Both enhance waterfowl, fish

and other wildlife habitats and provide feeding/breeding grounds. And lastly, both floodplains provide natural erosion control and open space so further flooding damage does not occur.

## DRAINAGE SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

As simple as it may sound, simply keeping smaller ditches and streams free of debris can dramatically improve the run-off capacity of low-lying areas, as well as greatly reduce the occurrence blockage that significantly contributes to flooding. It is illegal to dump materials into a required waterway and violators may be fined. If you see someone in the act of dumping or see debris in one of our watercourses, please contact the Engineering Dept. at (770) 920-7242.

## FLOOD WARNING SYSTEM

Many times, flooding along the Chattahoochee River and Sweetwater Creek can be predicted days in advance, giving ample warning for preparation and evacuation. However, in the event of a flash flood due a large rain event, you may be the first to notice the oncoming situation and have only hours to execute your plan. Notify the Douglas County Police/Fire Department. The Douglas County Emergency Alert System will be activated. You will also see regular interruption on local radio and television stations advising you of the situation.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you should require further or more detailed information regarding flood-related issues in Douglas County, here are some additional sources:

- FEMA.gov website
- Douglas County Development Services (770) 920-7242  
8700 Hospital Drive  
Douglasville, GA 30134
- Floodplain FAQ page on the [www.celebratedouglascounty.com](http://www.celebratedouglascounty.com)
- Douglas County Public Library

## Historic Floods of Sweetwater Creek

- July 1916 – Heavy rain causes a crest of 20.0' above flood stage.
- April 1979 – Heavy rain causes a crest of 19.9' above flood stage. Damage estimates are \$800,000.
- Feb. 1982 – Heavy rain causes record crest at 20.5'. Damage exceeds \$2,000,000.
- Feb. 1990 – Heavy rain causes extensive flooding in/around Atlanta. Total damage estimated at \$15.7 million.
- Aug. 1996 – 2" of rain in one hour in the Bill Arp area and causes over \$1,000,000 in damages including damage to over 20 roads.
- March 1998 – Heavy rainfall causes \$500,000 in property damage.
- May 2003 – Heavy rainfall of up to 4" in 24 hours causes \$15,000 damage in Lithia Springs area.
- June 2003 – Tropical storm Bill brought up to 7 inches of rain in 24 hours causing \$30,000 in damages to north Douglas County.
- Sept. 2004 – Hurricane Ivan brought 4" of rain but causes only minimal damage.
- July 2005 – Tropical storm Cindy and hurricane Dennis combine to dump up to 10" of rainfall in 48 hours causing a flood crest of 21.8' above flood stage, setting a new record high and causing extensive damage in the Lithia Springs area estimated to be \$6,000,000. Damage included 17 severely damaged roads as well as damage to 86 homes.