

# The National Flood Insurance Program and Building in the Floodplain

## What is the National Flood Insurance Program?

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) is a federal program enabling property owners and renters to purchase flood insurance. It is based on an agreement between your community and the federal government. The agreement states that if your community adopts and enforces floodplain management regulations which at least meet minimum federal requirements, the federal government will make flood insurance available in your community.

## How do I know if I'm in the floodplain?

The floodplain is identified as a Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA) in your community's Flood Insurance Study and the accompanying Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) published by FEMA. Your community's building officials or floodplain administrators have these documents available for you to see. The flood level shown for these SFHA has a 1% chance of being equalled or exceeded in any one year. That translates into a 26% chance of flooding over a typical 30-year mortgage period as compared to a 1% chance of fire damage over the same period.

## What is substantial damage?

Substantial damage is damage of any origin to a structure where the cost of restoring the structure to its before damage condition would equal or exceed fifty percent (50%) percent of its pre-disaster value.

## When does it affect me?

The NFIP requires participating communities to regulate through building permits any new or substantially improved structures during non-disaster periods and to monitor and identify any substantially damaged structures as a result of a disaster within the community's floodplain areas. Participating communities adopt an ordinance requiring new buildings to be elevated at or above the Base Flood Elevation (BFE) within the identified floodplain. Non-residential buildings have the option of being dry flood proofed. Existing buildings that are substantially damaged or improved (50% or more) must be elevated or floodproofed to meet the same building code standard as a new building. When you apply for a building permit, you will be informed whether or not you are in a floodplain and what

further steps are required to repair or reconstruct your building if you are within this defined area. If your building was flooded but not substantially damaged there is a wide range of inexpensive measures described in this booklet that can help you reduce future flood damage.

## How high will I have to elevate? Or floodproof?

The elevation or floodproofing requirement is based upon the BFE as indicated in the Flood Insurance Study of your community. This elevation may or may not be comparable to the last major flood. Though you had ten feet of water in your home during the last flood that may not mean you will need to elevate or floodproof to that height. Your community's building official can assist you in determining the elevation requirement for your structure.

## What happens if I refuse to comply?

Participating communities in the NFIP, agree to enforce its floodplain regulations. If you do not obtain a permit and do not elevate or floodproof when required, your community could take legal action against you. This may include stopping the development, revoking the permit, imposing a fine, or withholding a certificate of occupancy. If the structure is in violation of the regulations, flood insurance premiums could be extremely costly, possibly making the structure difficult to sell. Non-compliance could jeopardize your community's continued participation in the NFIP. Federally secured loans and federal disaster assistance are restricted in communities not participating in the NFIP that contain one or more SFHA which have been identified on a FIRM or Flood Hazard Boundary Map (FHBM) for at least one year prior to the disaster declaration. Additionally, structures located in the floodplain which are not elevated or floodproofed as required pose a threat to the health and safety of the occupants.

## What if I have more questions?

Your building and floodplain management officials are responsible for implementing the requirements of the local floodplain management ordinance, including the substantial damage provisions. Following a disaster declaration, the requirements pertaining to substantial damage will be presented to your community officials in detail at meetings held in various locations in the state. FEMA will work with building officials to help identify structures which may qualify as substantially damaged. In addition, FEMA will provide technical assistance to local building officials concerning the repair or reconstruction of substantially damaged structures.