



**TN**

Department of  
**Environment &  
Conservation**

# Short-term Response to Flooding: A Guide for Communities and Local Governments

## Frequently Asked Questions

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## Executive Summary

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) created a short-term guide for officials and community members to provide information in the hours, days, and weeks following a flood event. Please use this as a reference for basic answers to questions that may arise regarding TDEC's responsibilities immediately after a flood. **This guide is not intended to inform or influence planning activities, floodplain management, or major projects that require engineering studies and permits, nor is it intended to be a comprehensive guide to community response to flooding. Communities participating in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) should always consult the community's local floodplain ordinance or resolution and the most recent National Flood Insurance Program Flood Damage Assessment Package to ensure that actions taken immediately after a flood are not in violation of NFIP conditions.** Contact numbers for emergency resources and technical assistance for various local, state, and federal agencies involved in community flooding response are listed at the end of the document.

**FOR EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE** please contact your [local emergency management office](#) or call the 24-hour number for the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) at: **1-800-262-3300**.

### *Background*

State law authorizes municipalities and counties to adopt stormwater ordinances (municipalities) or resolutions (counties). These ordinances and resolutions vary for different areas, so interested parties will need to research local regulations regarding stormwater management as it relates to flooding. The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), in most cases, does not regulate flooding. TDEC regulatory authority is specific to water quality. However, if a flood control or repair project involves stream alterations/relocations and/or could affect water quality, the project may require submittal of engineering analyses to the local floodplain administrator, documentation, and/or TDEC permits. **Communities participating in the NFIP should consult the local floodplain ordinance or resolution for additional considerations regarding flood control or repair projects.**

Under Tennessee law, TDEC regulates many of the construction activities in or near lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands. Repair and restoration activities after a natural disaster may require TDEC approval and NFIP compliance. TDEC Environmental Field Offices and the State

NFIP Office may help in answering questions. Call **1-800-891-TDEC** to reach the appropriate Environmental Field Office or use this [link](#).

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***1. Flooding has caused stream channel migration or bank instability. What can I do to improve the stream channel?***

The General Aquatic Resource Alteration Permit (ARAP) is a streamlined, expedited authorization for projects that propose minor impacts to water resources. General Permits related to bank stabilization, structure maintenance, and utility lines are often used to cover activities related to flood response. **Emergency expedited ARAP General and Individual permits and authorizations are available through Division of Water Resources.** An emergency is defined as a situation that poses an immediate threat to public health, safety, or the environment. If you feel such a situation exists, immediately contact the local [TDEC Environmental Field Office](#) to discuss addressing the situation.

The procedures to obtain ARAP coverage, included activities, and conditions of the General Permits can be reviewed at this [link](#). The application fee for a private landowner is \$50 and these General Permits are typically issued within 30 days of receipt of a complete application. An annual maintenance fee will be required if the coverage extends beyond one year. The permittee must terminate permit coverage upon completion of the project in order to end or prevent the annual maintenance fee. Activities covered under ARAP General Permits may include:

- Replacing pipes and culverts;
- Certain streambank stabilization activities:
  - Hard armoring of less than 300 linear feet of one bank;
  - Hard armoring of less than 200 feet of both banks; or
  - Soil bioengineering of less than 1,000 feet;
- Some in-stream structures in conjunction with stabilization activities; and
- Emergency repair of imminent threats to public infrastructure.

Projects exceeding these thresholds or requiring use of heavy equipment in-stream may require an individual ARAP. Although the application fee for a private landowner is still \$50, these permits are for targeted activities and are specific to the site and work proposed. Activities requiring an individual permit are evaluated on a case-by-case basis to ensure they will be effective and will not inadvertently cause additional problems to landowners or the

environment. Such projects require public notice and coordination with other state and federal agencies and may require mitigation for stream impacts. Detailed information regarding the ARAP program can be found at this [link](#).

**Communities participating in the NFIP should consult the local floodplain administrator and State NFIP Office for additional engineering analysis requirements when doing any encroachment along a stream to ensure compliance of flood control or repair projects.**

***2. There is damage to culverts or debris obstructing stream flow. Can I clean it up?***

- Residents can always remove trash or woody debris by hand, chain saw, or winch from a channel.
- Residents can always clean out culverts and pipes clogged by debris for a cumulative maximum distance of 100 linear feet immediately above and below the structure, or placement of riprap within 25 feet upstream and 25 feet downstream of existing structures.
- Residents can conduct bank stabilization activities where the length of the stream or reservoir bank to be treated does not exceed a total length of 50 feet on one or both banks (limited to one site per 1000 linear feet of stream or reservoir bank), or 150 feet of a Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) managed reservoir shoreline.

Notification to TDEC is not required for these activities provided the work is performed in accordance with the General Conditions of the [Maintenance](#) or [Bank Armoring and Vegetative Stabilization](#) General Permits. For activities involving use of heavy equipment within the stream channel, please see Question 1.

Any bank stabilization project will need to have a floodplain development permit and engineering analysis to analyze the base flood elevation, floodway width, and base flood discharge. Please consult with the local community floodplain administrator and State NFIP Office for engineering analysis standards.

***3. I am a local government official or facility operator. I am concerned that there is damage to drinking water and/or wastewater facilities.***

Drinking water and wastewater facilities should communicate any damages during emergencies to the local emergency management agency contact and consult with the local [TDEC Environmental Field Office](#) for guidance. See above contact information.

#### ***4. Our roadways have been impacted by flooding. Whose responsibility are the roadways?***

Roads are owned and maintained by the State of Tennessee, counties, cities, or private citizens depending on their designations. The state, county, or city may have a list of roads that they each maintain. Additionally, the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) provides [Emergency Services Maps](#) that indicate road ownership and locations of fire stations, hospitals, and police departments. A map of Tennessee with TDOT-maintained roads may be found [here](#).

#### ***5. There is damage to structures and buildings? What should we do?***

Be sure to carefully document assessment of damage immediately following a flooding event. If there is damage done to a home or building in a floodplain, the floodplain administrator will need to do a damage assessment. Documentation can occur in the form of photos, videos, written accounts, and by marking maps with relevant information following the flood. High water marks should be collected and documented. Also, be sure to document recovery efforts including volunteer time after the disaster. Not only will thorough documentation help with recovery, but this documentation can be used to help prepare for future flooding events by indicating what infrastructure was damaged and what might be susceptible in subsequent events. In the event of a declared disaster, this documentation will be required if seeking Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Public Assistance grants.

**Residents living in an NFIP participating community should consult with the local floodplain administrator prior to reconstruction activities to make sure the development is compliant with floodplain regulations and submit a detailed cost estimate prior to the issuance of a building permit or reconstruction.**

#### ***6. I'm returning home after a flooding event. Can I use tap water?***

Public water system users should consider turning on and running faucets for at least five minutes before using water for drinking or food preparation. Check with the local health department, local water utility, or TDEC's relevant [Environmental Field Office](#) to see if a boil order is issued, and be sure to follow directions from local authorities.

### ***7. My well may have been impacted by a flooding event? Can I use my well water?***

Private well owners whose wells have been flooded should assume that wells are contaminated. Do not drink or bathe in water from a private well that has been or is currently flooded. Plan to sample and test well water for contaminants after floodwaters have receded. If the water is cloudy, odorous, or discolored, do not drink the water. Disinfection procedures for wells can be found at this [link](#) and within the [Tennessee Healthy Well Manual](#).

### ***8. My septic field may have been impacted by a flooding event. What should I do?***

Signs that a system may have a problem are slow, gurgling, or overflowing drains or toilets. Raw sewage may also back up into the shower and bath drains. Avoid contact with any septic system components until they are dry and clean. Do not pump the septic tank during an active flood as this may cause the tank to float out of the ground. Instead, reduce all nonessential water use and plug all drains in the lowest level of the home, if that is an option. Pump the septic system immediately after the flood waters have receded. Have the system professionally inspected.

### ***9. As a resident where can I take flood impacted debris and waste that is not accepted with my normal curbside pickup?***

Please check first with the county Public Works or Emergency Management Agency. In many cases, the local Solid Waste officials will have designated emergency debris drop off and staging areas. If these are not available, mixed municipal solid waste must go to a transfer station or a Class I landfill. General construction and demolition debris also go to these facilities or a Class III or IV landfill. In some cases, local convenience center drop-off locations will also accept this waste. There may or may not be a fee involved. A map of these can be found at this [link](#).

### ***10. As a county or municipal official, how do I designate an emergency debris drop off location?***

After a flood event, contact the local [TDEC Environmental Field Office](#) and make the request. State Division of Solid Waste Management officials in these regions will assist in facilitating these approvals. In addition, if burning debris is a consideration, contact the Division of Air Pollution Control for guidance. You may also consult the [Emergency Debris Disposal \(Staging Area Approval and Waste Disposal\) Policy \(PN117\)](#).

## **11. Are there any other resources for proactive debris management?**

The State of Tennessee has developed a [Debris Removal Planning Tool](#) and the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) has guidance about planning for natural disaster debris.](#)

## **12. What other resources are available for flood related concerns?**

### Disaster Recovery

- Tennessee Department of Agriculture Emergency Flood Response: <https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/farms/emergency-flood-response.html>
- Tennessee Post Disaster Guide: [https://silverjackets.nfrmp.us/portals/0/doc/Tennessee/Final\\_-\\_TN\\_Post\\_Disaster\\_Guide.pdf](https://silverjackets.nfrmp.us/portals/0/doc/Tennessee/Final_-_TN_Post_Disaster_Guide.pdf)

### Funding and Assistance

- TEMA Mitigation Grant Programs: <https://www.tn.gov/tema/emergency-community/mitigation/mitigation-grant-programs.html>
- FEMA Flood Mitigation Assistance: <https://www.fema.gov/flood-mitigation-assistance-grant-program>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Disaster Assistance Programs: <https://www.farmers.gov/recover>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Emergency Watershed Protection: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/landscape/ewpp/>
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Assistance and Outreach: <https://www.lrn.usace.army.mil/Missions/Corps-of-Engineers-Assistance-and-Outreach/>

### Floodplain Management

- National Flood Insurance Program Technical Resources: <https://www.tn.gov/tema/national-flood-insurance-program/nfip-technical-resources.html>
- Tennessee Floodplain Management, 2018 Quick Guide: [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tema/documents/national-flood-insurance/2018\\_TN\\_QuickGuide.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tema/documents/national-flood-insurance/2018_TN_QuickGuide.pdf)

### TDEC Resources

- Tennessee Landowner's Guide to Streambank Protection and Stabilization: [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/environment/sustainable-practices/resilience/2019-7-22--A%20Landowners%20Guide%20to%20Streambank%20Protection%20and%20Stabilization%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/environment/sustainable-practices/resilience/2019-7-22--A%20Landowners%20Guide%20to%20Streambank%20Protection%20and%20Stabilization%20(1).pdf)

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### Contacts

- Local Floodplain Administrators: <https://www.tn.gov/tema/national-flood-insurance-program/statewide-floodplain-administrator-directory.html>
- State NFIP Office: 615-532-6683
- Regional Emergency Management Agency Offices: <https://www.tn.gov/tema/prepare/regional-ema-contacts.html>
- TEMA 24-hour Number: **1-800-262-3300**
- TDEC Environmental Field Offices: 1-800-891-TDEC