Flooding –
Our Nation’s Most Frequent and Costly Natural Disaster

HISTORY AND CAUSES

HEAVY RAINS
All areas of the country are at heightened risk for flooding due to heavy rains. The Northeast is at especially high risk due to heavy rains produced by Nor’easters. This excessive rainfall can happen in any season, putting property at risk year round. In April 2007, a powerful Nor’easter dropped up to 9 inches of rain in parts of New Jersey, and more than 8 inches in New York City’s Central Park – quadrupling a 101-year-old record.

WEST COAST THREATS
The West Coast rainy season usually lasts from November to April, bringing heavy flooding and increased flood risks with it; however, flooding can happen at anytime. Wildfire-scorched land brings the potential for mudflows and heavy floods. In July 2008, heavy rain over wildfire-stricken land resulted in mudflows and flooding that affected more than 50 homes in Independence, California.

LEVEES & DAMS
The US has thousands of miles of levees and dams that are designed to protect against a certain level of flooding. These structures can erode and weaken over time. They can also be overtopped, or even fail during large floods, creating even more damage. The record-breaking Midwest floods of 2008 left homes in Lawrenceville, IL submerged after a levee breached on the Embarras River.

FLASH FLOODS
Flash flooding is the #1 weather-related killer in the U.S. A flash flood is a phenomenon that occurs within 6 hours of an event that generates significant flood waters, such as a thunderstorm, the collapse of a man made structure or an ice break. In July 2008, 9 inches of rain in New Mexico caused flash floods that damaged nearly 500 houses, campers, mobile homes and other structures.

Visit www.floodsmart.gov/noaafloodweek to learn more about flooding and preparedness.