

The Facts on Flooding in Decatur

Although the city is located at the top of the watershed, Decatur periodically experiences minor to moderate localized flooding. These conditions are a symptom of the fully developed nature of the city. Several flood problems were documented in a January 1988 report prepared by the City Manager's Office. Flooding problems have occurred along Peavine Creek at a condominium complex near Coventry Road. Along Peavine Creek Tributary, five houses at the end of Westchester Drive, two houses on the south side of Garden Lane, and two houses on the south side of Lamont Drive, are subject to occasional flooding.

Two isolated locations in the upper Peavine Creek Basin, Landsdowne Avenue at Hibernia Avenue, and an area along North Candler Street, have some problems with flood damage due to poor localized drainage. Occasional flooding on South Fork Peachtree Creek Tributary has been a continuing problem for property owners in the vicinity of Willow Lane just downstream of the Church Street crossing.

In 1971, a flood on this tributary resulted in substantial personal property damage near Landover Drive and North Decatur Road. Potential for flood damages appears to be minimal in the southern half of the city, which is drained by Shoal Creek and Sugar Creek Tributary. The lack of any significant history of flood damages to residences and other buildings along Shoal Creek and its tributaries is due to the absence of development on the floodplains in the southeastern section of the city. Because of extensive storm drainage improvements in the past, no recent flood damage problems have been experienced along Sugar Creek Tributary.

Although damage to buildings generally is limited, ponding behind drainage pipes and culverts and flooding of streets, driveways, parking lots, and yards are a recurring concern at some locations in Peavine Creek,

Shoal Creek, and South Fork Peachtree Creek Tributary basins. For example, the Peavine Creek basin often experiences flooding problems. Channel erosion and damage to drainage and bank stabilization structures are also a problem in some areas of these three basins. As a result of basin improvements, areas drained by Sugar Creek Tributary have been relatively free of ponding or erosion problems for many years.

City Flood Services

Decatur's Design, Environment, and Construction Division provides general and site-specific flood and flood-related information on property located within the city limits. To obtain site-specific responses, individuals making inquiries must provide a survey of the specific property and elevation data relating to existing structures and site topography. The Design, Environment, and Construction Division and the Decatur Public Library also have reference documents on flooding and flood protection available for review.

A map information service is available from the division for a \$10 fee. This service provides inquirers with the current Flood Insurance Rate Map information and identifies whether a property is in a Special Flood

Hazard Area. An accurate street address or DeKalb County/Decatur Tax Parcel number is needed to obtain this information. Anyone desiring this service should contact the Design, Environment, and Construction Division, 404-370-4104.

What You Can Do

Several of the city's efforts depend on your cooperation and assistance. Here is how you can help:

- Do not dump debris or throw anything into the ditches or streams. Depositing debris, trash, and other items in ditches and streams is a violation of the city's Solid Waste Ordinance Section 82-38. Even grass clippings and branches can accumulate and clog channels. A clogged channel cannot carry the necessary volume of water. When it rains the water has to go somewhere, usually flooding yards and streets, thus damaging property and endangering public safety. Every piece of trash contributes to flooding.
- Individual property owners are responsible for maintenance of the creeks and drainage ditches on their property. Please do your part and keep the banks clear of brush and debris. In addition to maintaining the public roadways and public drainage facilities, the city can help remove major blockages from the creeks, such as fallen trees.
- Please report the depositing of debris and trash into streams and storm drains and blockages to the Design, Environment, and Construction Division, 404-370-4104.
- Check with the division before you build on, alter, re-grade, or fill on your property. Such activities in floodplains are strictly regulated and permits may be needed.
- Report illegal construction activities to the Design, Environment, and Construction Division, 404-370-4104.

City of Decatur Design, Environment, and Construction Division
404-370-4104 • decaturga.com

Floodproofing

There are several different ways to protect a building from flood damage. For example, you can re-grade your lot or build a small floodwall or earthen berm. These methods work if your lot is large enough, if flooding is not too deep, and if your property is not in the designated floodway. Please note that permits are required prior to undertaking these and similar activities.

Another approach is to waterproof your walls and place watertight closures over the doorways. This method is not recommended for houses with basements or if water will get more than two feet deep.

You can also consider raising the house above flood levels. You may drive by and check out the dwellings at 504 Westchester Dr. and 249 S. Columbia Dr. to see examples of elevated buildings.

Many houses, even those not in the floodplain, have sanitary sewers that back up into the basement during heavy rains. This may be due to stormwater infiltration into the sanitary sewer line. A plug or standpipe can stop this if the water doesn't get more than one or two feet deep. These can be purchased at a hardware store for under \$25. For deeper sewer backup flooding, talk to a plumber.

The above measures are called floodproofing or retrofitting. More information is available from the Decatur Engineering Department or the Decatur Public Library. Please note that re-grading or filling in the floodplain requires a permit. Also, any alteration to your building or land may require a permit from the Design, Environment, and Construction Division.

If you know a major flood is coming, you should shut off the gas and electricity and move valuable contents upstairs or raise items off the floor. Fortunately, the flooding experienced in Decatur is localized and most floodwaters will recede within a matter of a few hours. However it is unlikely that you will get much warning, so a detailed checklist prepared in advance will help ensure that you don't forget anything.

Flood Insurance

If you don't have flood insurance, talk to your insurance agent. Most homeowners insurance policies do not cover damage from floods. However, because the City of Decatur participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and implements activities that exceed the minimum NFIP standards, you can purchase a separate flood insurance policy at discounted premiums. This insurance is backed by the federal government and is available to everyone, even for properties that have been flooded in the past. There is a 30-day waiting period from the time the insurance is applied for until it becomes effective.

Some people have purchased flood insurance because the financial institution required it when they got a mortgage or home improvement loan. Usually these policies just cover the building's structure and not the contents. Property owners need to verify with their insurance agent what the extent of contents coverage is available. During a flood in 1990, the damage to the contents of a property near the South Fork Peachtree Creek Tributary exceeded the damage to the structure.

At last count, there were 202 active flood insurance policies in the city of Decatur. If you are covered, check out the amount and make sure you have contents coverage. Remember: even if the last flood missed you or you have done some floodproofing, the next flood could be worse. Flood insurance covers all surface floods.

Flood Safety

Do not walk through flowing water. Drowning is the number one cause of flood deaths, mostly during flash floods. Currents can be deceptive; six inches of moving water can knock you off your feet. If you walk in standing water, use a pole or stick to ensure the ground is still there. Do not drive through a flooded area. More people drown in their cars than anywhere else. Don't drive around road barriers; the road or bridge may be washed out. Stay away from power lines and electrical wires. The number two flood killer after drowning is electrocution. Electrical

current can travel through water. Report downed power lines to the Georgia Power Company by dialing toll free 1-888-660-5890.

If your house or other structure is flooded, contact the power company to turn off the electricity. Some appliances, such as television sets, keep electrical charges even after they have been unplugged. Don't use appliances or motors that have gotten wet unless they have been taken apart, cleaned and dried by qualified personnel. Look out for animals, especially snakes. Small animals that have been flooded out of their homes may seek shelter in yours. Use a pole or stick to poke and turn things over and scare away small animals.

Look before you step. After a flood, the ground and floors are covered with debris including broken bottles and nails. Floors and stairs that have been covered with mud can be slippery. Be alert for gas leaks. Use a flashlight to inspect for damage. Don't smoke or use candles, lanterns, or open flames, unless you know the gas has been turned off and the area has been ventilated.

Inspections – Repair and Maintenance Activities

The Drainage Division of the Design, Environment, and Construction Division is available to conduct site visits to review flood, drainage, and storm sewer problems and determine if corrective repair or maintenance action is the responsibility of the city or the private property owner. For more information regarding this service or to request an inspection call 404-370-4104.

Learn More

For more information call the Design, Environment, and Construction Division or visit decaturga.com and follow the links to the floodplain information. Copies of this document can be obtained at Decatur City Hall, 509 N. McDonough St., or the Leveritt Public Works Building, 2635 Talley St.