

# Flood Facts

Understanding seasonal flooding & calculating your risk

Interview compiled by Sara Samovalov



Bo Gell is global product manager, wastewater, for Xylem Inc. Gell has worked in Xylem's Applied Water Systems business unit for five years and has extensive experience in residential, commercial and marine pumps.

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**A**ugust is prime time for the summer storms that dump inches of rain in the span of minutes or hours. This excess water can end up in places where it does not belong, including inside homes. W&WD Associate Editor Sara Samovalov spoke with Xylem's Bo Gell about the dangers of seasonal floods and the steps homeowners might take to counteract their effects.

**Sara Samovalov: Why do seasonal floods happen?**

**Bo Gell:** Seasonal floods occur for a variety of reasons, such as heavy prolonged rainfall and snowmelt that cause water levels in rivers, lakes and other bodies of water to rise and overflow their banks. Seasonal floods are a natural and necessary process—we rely on them to replenish aquifers and bring nutrients back to the soil. Still, these floods can be devastating to communities and the environment and are not always predictable. Different areas of the country experience flooding at various times of the year and for myriad reasons—erosion and development can also play a role—so it is important to understand local flood risks in order to be as prepared as possible.

**Samovalov: At what time of year is seasonal flooding most destructive?**

**Gell:** Flooding can be destructive at any time throughout the year as weather patterns are specific to each region. Although there might be specific times with heightened risk, such as early spring in regions that experience snow melt or heavy rains, it is best to take the proper precautions to always be prepared in the event of a flood.

**Samovalov: Does risk of seasonal flood damage vary depending on where a person lives?**

**Gell:** Floods that occur in densely populated, flood-prone areas have resulted in some of the worst natural disasters in history, causing extreme loss of life. Homeowners in low-lying areas near a coast or near another body of water cannot ignore the threat of flooding. Still, almost all homes have some level of flood risk. In fact, over the past five years, there have been floods in all 50 states. Newly constructed homes are not commonly thought of as being more prone to flooding, but it is important to note that

## Help! My home was flooded!

If a home is flooded despite the homeowner's best efforts, he or she should act quickly, Gell said.

The necessary course of action post-flood depends on the level of water inside the home, so "it varies from case to case," Gell said. "Generally speaking, if it is just removing moisture, a homeowner should be able to dry it out with fans and dehumidifiers and then disinfect with the appropriate solution for the conditions."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s website offers information on how to properly clean and disinfect after a flood.

That said, "If there is substantial standing water, there is a risk of mold, structural damage, damage to the furnace or water heater and additional electrical hazards. In those situations, homeowners should consult a professional," Gell said.

Homeowners who rely on wells for their water should monitor their quality after a flood, as floods can introduce toxins to the water supply.

those located on newly developed land may be at risk due to disrupted natural runoff paths.

**Samovalov: What are some signs to watch for in order to tell if a home is prone to being damaged in a seasonal flood?**

**Gell:** The first step is to assess the location of the home to determine if it is located in a floodplain. If a property has been flooded in the past, there will often be flood markers such as a water line that will show how high the water rose. Also, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) conducts a Flood Insurance Study that provides information on high-risk areas in many communities.

**Samovalov: What are some steps a person might take to combat seasonal flooding?**

**Gell:** For typical seasonal flooding, equipping a home with the right products can be the difference between little to no damage or very costly repairs. First and foremost, install a sump pump that can stand up to harsh conditions.

In the event of a power outage, a sump pump will also lose power, unless there is a backup power source to keep it running.

In addition to having a reliable sump pump and power source, another suggestion is for homeowners to make sure they have sufficient insurance. The majority of home insurance does not cover flooding. Homeowners should consult their insurance provider to find out what is covered by their policy.

**Samovalov: Does climate change have an effect on seasonal flooding? How can people cope with those effects?**

**Gell:** Weather changes from year to year, and it is impossible to account for every scenario that could occur. It is advisable to stay aware of emerging weather trends and take additional precautions if the need arises. Generally speaking, the best course of action for homeowners is to take all the steps they can to protect their home. This includes a reliable sump pump, backup power source and financial protection through homeowner's insurance if possible. **w&wd**

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