
ARE YOU PREPARED FOR A FLOOD IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?



Illinois Street in 1972, after tidal flooding

What should you do before a flood?

➤ **Determine if your property is located in an area subject to flooding.** A large percentage of the City is located in flood hazard areas. The following areas are particularly vulnerable to flooding:

- The Weeks & Garden Neighborhoods, east of Pulgas Avenue
- The Woodland Neighborhood, between San Francisquito Creek & the Bayshore Freeway
- The University Village Neighborhood, north of Notre Dame Avenue
- The portion of the Ravenswood Business District closest to the baylands
- The Kavanaugh Neighborhood
- The Palo Alto Park Neighborhood, west of Menalto Avenue

This is not a complete list of areas that are located within flood zones, but rather a list of areas with documented flooding problems. If your neighborhood is not listed, your property may still be within a flood zone, as designated by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) maps. Upon request, the Engineering

The History of Flooding in the City of East Palo Alto.

East Palo Alto has experienced numerous floods in its history that have caused substantial property damage. Most recently, in 1998, a major flood event damaged millions of dollars of property, forced the evacuation of hundreds of people and forced the closure of major thoroughfares such as the Bayshore Freeway, University Avenue, Willow Road, Clarke Avenue and Woodland Avenue. In 1972, tidal flood waters completely submerged streets in the University Village neighborhood. In 1989, a flood event put Bell Street Park underwater. It is critical to remember that the City of East Palo Alto, being located adjacent to San Francisquito Creek and San Francisco Bay, is subject to major flood events. In the future, flooding may occur from events such as overflow of San Francisquito Creek and levee failure along the baylands. Being prepared is your best defense against such events.



City of East Palo Alto
2415 University Avenue
East Palo Alto, CA 94303

Division at (650) 853-3189, will make flood zone determinations for properties within the City. FEMA maps are also available in the East Palo Alto Library and the Community Development Department office at 1960 Tate Street. If located in an “A”, “AE”, “AH”, or “VE” Zone, your property is within the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA), which is an area that has been determined to have the potential for flooding caused by a 100-year storm. The Building Division also maintains elevation certificates for many properties within the city which are also available for review.

It is important to note that, even properties that are not located in the flood zone could potentially be flooded under certain conditions. For example, in the flood of 1998, floodwaters turned Bell Street Park into a lake and submerged the floor of the Bell Street Park Gymnasium under several feet of water. This massive flood damage occurred even though Bell Street Park is located nearly a ¼ mile from the flood zone.



Channels to drain flooded Bell Street Park after the 1998 flood

➤ **Purchase flood insurance on your property.** Flooding is not covered by a standard homeowner’s insurance policy. A separate flood insurance policy is required to cover damages incurred by flooding. Coverage is available for the building itself as well as for the contents of the building. The

City of East Palo Alto participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) that makes available federally backed flood insurance for all structures, whether or not they are located within the floodplain. Note that there is a 30-day waiting period before coverage goes into effect. More than 25 percent of NFIP claims are filed by properties located outside the 100-year floodplain, also known as the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA). Contact your insurance agency for more information. Flood insurance information is also available in the East Palo Alto Library and at the Community Development Department office at 1960 Tate Street.

It is a good idea to make a list of all personal property, including furniture, clothing and valuables. Photos inside and outside of your home are helpful. This will assist your insurance adjustor in settling claims and will help prove uninsured losses, which are tax deductible.

➤ **Maintain drainage channels and pipes free of obstruction and debris.** The City of East Palo Alto performs cleaning and maintenance activities on the drainage channels and pipes in City easements & rights-of-way in accordance with an established schedule and other standard operating procedures. Residents are encouraged to assist in maintaining the drainage in their areas by removing or reporting obstructions (such as shopping carts, leaves, debris, trash, etc.). Keeping drainage channels free of obstructions reduces flooding in the event of heavy rains. By way of City ordinance, it is illegal to dump trash, leaves, landscape debris, paint, grease, or any other material into any portion of the City’s drainage system. Such dumping can have devastating impacts on water quality in addition to causing flooding. To report obstructions or illegal dumping, or for questions regarding drainage system

maintenance, please contact the Public Works Department at (650) 853-3189.

➤ **Protect your property from the hazards of flooding.** Various methods may be used to minimize flooding. If the floor level of your property is lower than the “Base Flood Elevation” (elevation of the 100-year flood, based on the FEMA maps), consider elevating your structure, if possible. Brochures discussing flood proofing and other mitigation measures are available at the Community Development Department Office at 1960 Tate Street. If a flood is imminent, property can be protected by sandbagging areas subject to the entry of water into living spaces. The East Palo Alto Maintenance Division has sandbags available for pickup at the City Corporation Yard located at 150 Tara Road. Valuables, furniture, water heaters, furnaces, electrical switch boxes and outlets may also be moved to higher areas of the dwelling to minimize damages. It is also a good idea to check that your fuel tank is anchored securely, your drain door has a float plug, and your plumbing has a backflow valve. For more information, please contact the Building Division at (650) 853-3129.

➤ **Meet improvement requirements.** The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) requires that if the cost of reconstruction, additions, or other improvements to a building equals or exceeds 50% of the building’s market value, then the building must meet the same construction requirements as a new building. Substantially damaged buildings must also be brought up to the same standards. For example, a residence damaged so that the cost of repairs equals or exceeds 50% of the building’s value before it was damaged must be elevated above the base flood elevation. Please contact the Building Division at (650) 853-3129 for more information.

➤ **Meet permitting requirements.** All development within the city requires a permit. Always check and fulfill permitting requirements with the Building Division at (650) 853-3129 and the Planning Division at (650) 853-3185 before you build on, alter, fill, or re-grade on any portion of your property and/or within any easement or right-of-way. Also, contact either of the numbers above to report any suspected permitting violations.

➤ **Keep emergency supplies.** Non-perishable food, water, batteries, flashlights, a manual can opener, and a battery-operated radio should be kept available. Keep a supply of sandbags on hand. Plywood, plastic sheeting and lumber can be used to protect your property. Sandbags cannot be stored for a long time because burlap bags filled with sand or dirt will rot. Sandbags must be filled immediately before or during a storm. Sandbags should only be half full of sand and it is important to note that sandbags will not completely seal out water.

➤ **Prepare an evacuation plan.** Learn the safest route to high, safe ground if you have to evacuate in a hurry. Decide on a place where your family can meet during and after a flood.



Be Cautious. Flood waters can rise rapidly. Do not attempt to drive your vehicle on flooded streets. They may stall or get swept away.

What should you do during a flood?

➤ **Tune-in to local commercial radio or television stations**, including: KCBS - AM 740, KGO - AM 810, KSJX - AM 1500 (*Vietnamese*), KQED - FM 88.5, KSOL - FM 98.9 (*Spanish*), KSJO - FM 92, and KZST - FM 100.1 to listen for warning bulletins and any corresponding emergency instructions. The City will order or advise evacuations if conditions warrant this action. If evacuations are called for, it is imperative that you follow instructions in the time frame noted. The Office of Emergency Services facilitates the alert systems for San Mateo County. East Palo Alto is included. Currently we have a telephone system and a text messaging system. SMCAAlert (Roam) is a county wide alert system that text messages information to cell phones, pagers, e-mail and handheld devices. To sign up to receive these notifications, please go to the SMCAAlert website at <https://www.smcalert.info>.

Dialogic is an automated telephone notification system that is able to telephone residents during an emergency. There is no need to sign up for Dialogic. The City of East Palo Alto has a list of potential emergency shelters. Ten (10) of these facilities are within the City. The Red Cross pre-screened these locations to ensure they were up to standard. If and/or when the need arises, residents will be instructed to go to the most suitable location through the radio, alert systems and other means that are available.

➤ **Avoid flood waters.** Be cautious. Flood waters rise rapidly, so be prepared to evacuate before flood waters reach your property. If dangerous flooding conditions are imminent, avoid driving a vehicle if possible. 6" of water will reach the bottom of passenger cars and will cause the loss of control or stalling. A foot

of water will float most vehicles. Two feet of rushing water will carry away most vehicles, including trucks and SUVs. If you are in a stalled car, abandon it as quickly as possible. Flood waters can rise quickly and sweep a car away. Many deaths have occurred from attempts to move stalled vehicles. Do not attempt to drive or wade through deep pockets of water. If you are caught by suddenly rising waters, move to the second floor, or the roof if necessary. Take warm clothing, a radio and flashlight with you. Wait for help. Do not swim for safety. Rescue teams will be looking for you.

➤ **Avoid low-lying areas.** If outside, look for higher ground. Seek shelter in the highest areas possible. Unstable banks should be avoided.

➤ **Disable Utilities.** If your property is in imminent danger of flooding, please contact PG&E to request that your power and natural gas be shut off, or for guidance on how to do it yourself. Turn off utilities at the main power switch and close the main gas valve. Do not touch any electrical equipment unless it is in a dry area and you are standing on a piece of dry wood while wearing rubber gloves and rubber soled boots or shoes.

➤ **Ensure that you have a safe source of drinking water.** Fill bathtubs, sinks and jugs with clean water in case regular supplies are contaminated. You can sanitize these items by first rinsing with bleach

What should you do after a flood?

➤ **Make sure the building is safe before you enter.** Make sure the building is not in danger of collapsing. Turn off any gas lines at the meter or tank and let the house air out for several minutes to remove foul odors or escaping gas. Upon entering your home, do not

use an open flame for a source of light in case there is still trapped gas. Use a battery operated flashlight instead. Watch for electrical shorts or live wires. Do not turn off any lights or appliances until an electrician has checked the system for short circuits.

➤ **Prevent health hazards.** Proceed with immediate cleanup measures to prevent health hazards. Boil water vigorously for 10 minutes before drinking to ensure that the water is safe. Cover broken windows and holes to prevent further damage.

➤ **Follow established procedures for property damage repairs.** Select a contractor who is licensed in his/her trade. The City of East Palo Alto requires contractors to be licensed by the Contractors State Licensing Board and to have a City of East Palo Alto Business License. Visit the Contractors State Licensing Board's website at: www.cslb.ca.gov to check if a contractor is properly licensed. Verify that contractors are licensed before signing or agreeing to any repair contracts. It is also recommended that you verify certification of liability and workman's compensation insurance. Complaints against licensed contractors may be referred to the Contractors State Licensing Board.

Require your contractors to obtain the proper permits for work being performed. Permits are required for any permanent improvement (including painting, roofing, siding, additions, alterations, etc.) to a structure and for site work such as grading, filling, etc. Permits are required even if a homeowner is doing the work himself or herself. Questions about permits or contractor licensing may be addressed to the City of East Palo Alto Building Division at (650) 853-3129.

Recognize the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains to help reduce flooding.

Floodplains are a natural component of the environment. Understanding and protecting the natural functions of floodplains helps reduce flood damage and protect resources. When flooding spreads out across the floodplain, its energy is dissipated, which results in lower flood flows downstream, deposition of sediments higher in the watershed and improved groundwater recharge. Floodplains are scenic, valued wildlife habitat, and suitable for farming. Poorly planned development in floodplains can lead to erosion, loss of valuable property, increased risk of flooding to downstream properties and degradation of water quality.

For more information about flood safety or the NFIP, please note the following:

<http://www.cityofepa.org>
www.floodalert.fema.gov
www.fema.gov/hazards/floods
1-888-FLOOD29

This information is provided by the City of East Palo Alto and is applicable to properties within the limits of the City. If you reside in a jurisdiction other than the City of East Palo Alto, contact your regulatory authority for information. If you believe you received this notice in error, or if you no longer own this property, please contact the City of East Palo Alto Planning Division at (650) 853-3185 or via U.S. mail.



This photograph shows San Francisquito Creek nearly overflowing onto East Bayshore Road after a storm.



This photograph shows the water level of San Francisquito Creek at near maximum capacity adjacent to homes in the City's Gardens Neighborhood.

Map of Special Flood Hazard Areas within the City of East Palo Alto



The aqua color represents areas located within the City of East Palo Alto that are located within a Special Flood Hazard Area.

Description of Special Flood Hazard Areas within the City of East Palo Alto

- Zone X** – Areas outside of the 500-year flood plain.
- Zone A** – No base flood elevations determined.
- Zone AE** – Base flood elevations determined.
- Zone AH** – Flood depths of 1-3 feet. (Usually areas of ponding); Base flood elevations determined.
- Zone VE** – Coastal flood with velocity hazard. (wave action). Base flood elevations determined.