

21 September 2009

Writer/Source: David Emory Stooksbury 706-583-0156

Special Flood Statement: Office of the State Climatologists

By David Emory Stooksbury
Office of the State Climatologist
The University of Georgia

Athens, GA. - Excessive rainfall over Georgia is causing extensive flooding across the northern half of the state. Many locations in north Georgia have exceeded the 100-year, 24-hour rainfall total. For the northern and central piedmont of Georgia, we expect a 24-hour rainfall total of 8 inches once in 100 years. In extreme northeast Georgia this value increases to 10 inches in 24-hours. In Rabun County the once in 100-year, 24-hour rainfall total is 11 inches.

Drowning in motor vehicles is the major cause of loss of life in floods. Most flood related deaths occur as the result of a car being driven into a flooded roadway.

The National Weather Service has a flood safety program called TADD: Turn Around, Don't Drown. The message is simple. If the roadway is flooded and one can not see the road, the safest decision is to turn around and use an alternate route.

Flooded roadways are dangerous because it is very difficult to judge the true depth of water. Even water as shallow as 5 inches can wash away a motor vehicle.

Additionally, a flooded road may appear to be solid, but the roadway or road foundation might be washed away or undermined. If the road is over a bridge, the road bed might have been washed away while the bridge sidings look fine thus giving the impression that the bridge is safe.

Another major cause of death during flooding is individuals falling into the water. This is especially a concern for children and teenagers. The banks of the flooded creek or river might be weakened by the flood. The additional weight of an individual standing on the bank may cause the bank to give way. The banks will be slippery because of the heavy rain increasing the likelihood of an individual falling into the flooded water.

Swimming, rafting or kayaking in flooded waters is very dangerous. The debris in the water can create natural low-head dams that are extremely dangerous. From upstream these dangerous natural low-head dams are all but invisible. Additionally the large amount of debris in a flood stream is an additional danger.

Because flooding is expected to continue through Monday night and move downstream over the next several days, all Georgians are encouraged to monitor the developing situation very closely. A NOAA weather radio is the best way to monitor potentially life threatening conditions. See <http://www.srh.weather.gov/ffc/>.

Additional weather information, including updated rainfall amounts, may be found at the UGA automated weather station network www.georgiaweather.net.

(David Emory Stooksbury is the state climatologist of Georgia and a professor of engineering and atmospheric sciences in The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.)