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THE IMPACT OF HURRICANES ON INLAND LOCATIONS

Major Inland Flooding Can Be A Serious Issue

FRAMINGHAM, MA – Hurricanes or tropical cyclones are not merely coastal events or wind events. As we saw in 2011 with Tropical Storm Irene, due to the fact that Massachusetts is a relatively small state, depending upon the storm's track, the entire Commonwealth could be severely impacted by a tropical storm or hurricane. The destruction dealt by the devastating winds can result in destroyed buildings, downed trees and power outages. However, the greatest damage is usually due to the impact of flooding.

“The sometimes forgotten threat associated with hurricanes, particularly in our inland communities is flooding,” stated Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency Director Kurt Schwartz. “The west side of the eye of a hurricane, as it moves northward along the Atlantic Coast, is the ‘wet side’, as the storm’s counterclockwise winds draw moisture from the ocean, potentially depositing torrential rains far inland.”

Intense rainfall is not directly related to high wind speeds of tropical cyclones. In fact, some of the greatest rainfall amounts occur from weaker storms that drift slowly or stall over an area. A tropical storm has the ability to produce more rainfall than a Category 5 hurricane. As all hurricanes weaken to tropical storms and move inland, the threat of torrential rains and high winds over large areas intensifies the risks of flooding.

Although weakened to a tropical storm prior to its arrival in the Commonwealth, in 1999, most of Hurricane Floyd's impact was rain and flood related, causing severe damage as far west as the Berkshires. In fact, some of our most devastating flooding associated with our historic storms has occurred in Central and Western Massachusetts. Up to 17” fell in conjunction with the ‘Hurricane of 1938’ and 25” of rain fell over a 5-day period in August 1955 from ‘Connie’ and ‘Diane’ both of which reached Massachusetts as Tropical Storms. During that period, the City of Westfield received 13.15” of rain in a single day.

While storm surge is always a potential coastal threat associated with hurricanes, more people in the U.S. have died from inland flooding over the past 40 years. Since the early 1970s, freshwater flooding has accounted for almost 60% of U.S. tropical cyclone deaths. These floods are why 63% of U.S. tropical cyclone deaths during that period occurred in inland counties. 78% of children killed by tropical cyclones drowned in freshwater floods.

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SAFETY TIPS TO REMEMBER

- Have a Family Disaster Kit.
- Develop a Family Communication Plan.
- Educate yourself about your community's Emergency Management Plan, including emergency warning systems, potential evacuation routes and locations of public shelters by contacting your local Emergency Management Director. Learn your area's vulnerability to flooding, as well.
- In highly flood-prone areas, keep materials on hand like sandbags, plywood, plastic sheeting, plastic garbage bags, lumber, shovels, work boots and gloves.
- Be aware of streams, drainage channels and areas known to flood, so you or your evacuation routes are not cut off.
- As a storm approaches, continually monitor the event on local Media.
- If advised to evacuate by Public Safety officials, do so immediately.
- Avoid driving into water of unknown depth; as little as 6" of water may cause you to lose control of your vehicle.
- Avoid downed power lines. Assumed a downed wire is a live wire.
- Have flood insurance. Flood damage is not usually covered by homeowners insurance. Do not make assumptions. Check your policy. The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) is a pre-disaster flood mitigation and insurance protection program. The National Flood Insurance Program makes federally backed flood insurance available to residents and business owners.

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) is the state agency responsible for coordinating federal, state, local, voluntary and private resources during emergencies and disasters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MEMA provides leadership to: develop plans for effective response to all hazards, disasters or threats; train emergency personnel to protect the public; provide information to the citizenry; and assist individuals, families, businesses and communities to mitigate against, prepare for, and respond to and recover from emergencies, both natural and man made. For additional information about MEMA and Preparedness, go to www.mass.gov/mema. Also, continue to follow MEMA updates on *Twitter* at www.twitter.com/MassEMA; *Facebook* at www.facebook.com/MassachusettsEMA. Download the free *ping4alert!* app to your Smartphone to receive important weather alerts and emergency messages from MEMA. Easy instructions are available at www.mass.gov/mema/mobileapp.