

Dear Editor,

Once again, the national news is led by stories of major flooding, this time in the Midwest. It is not “unheard of” or “beyond belief” or “could not be predicted” flooding, but flooding which can be expected from time to time, and has occurred a number of times in the last 15 years (which means most property owners were probably there and can remember it ).

While we in New York look with sympathy at the losses suffered as a result of the Midwest floods, we need to remember that New York is not immune. In fact, there have been numerous damaging floods in New York throughout history, including coastal floods downstate and on the Great Lakes, flash floods, large river floods, and ice jam floods. Since 1954, there have been 28 flood events severe enough to result in Presidential Disaster declarations, causing about a billion dollars in damage. Virtually no part of New York has been immune from flood damages.

Is flooding increasing? Yes, for a number of reasons: First, changes in rainfall patterns are occurring. It makes no difference if you think it is caused by global warming or something else--the reality is that while average yearly rainfall may remain fairly constant, rain occurs in less frequent, but more intense storms. Secondly, when development changes watersheds by converting farm land and forests to roof tops and big box parking lots, less water soaks in and more rain runs off into our streams and rivers. This increases the amount of water from each rainfall event in our streams and thus increases the flood heights. Lastly, more and more people live or work in flood prone areas, increasing flood damages.

Residents and business owners need to know their flood risk. They need to consult with FEMA’s flood maps while realizing that floods often do not stop at the line on the map. They need to buy flood insurance; the only way to protect their investment after a flood. If possible, avoid building in floodplains and never build in a manner that increases flood risks to others. Only by accepting personal and community responsibility will we not increase the adverse impacts associated with flooding.

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