

## **Prepare Now for the Next Flood**

Dear Editor:

Last week's flooding probably seemed like a freak event: the rain just kept falling; the streams kept rising; and the problems kept compounding. But this wasn't an isolated incident. Every year, flooding occurs somewhere in New York State, often many times and in many places.

When the waters recede, the survivors take a deep breath and set to work putting their lives back together. If you are in that situation, I wish you the very best in this daunting task. But as you clean up and rebuild, I would encourage you to think about how you can build smarter. Just because this kind of flooding hadn't occurred in recent memory is no guarantee that it won't occur again in the future.

Try to find ways to leave room for the stream and its floodwaters. Periodic high flows are a natural part of any stream system. When a stream overflows its banks and spreads out on the floodplain, the water slows down and its energy is dissipated. When these naturally beneficial floodplain functions are lost, high flows are funneled to downstream areas, increasing the volume and velocity of the flood.

If existing development can't be abandoned to make room for floodwaters, consider ways to make it more resilient to damage. Water should be able to enter and exit enclosed areas so that water pressure on exterior walls doesn't collapse the foundation. Buildings, fuel tanks, and other items should be securely anchored. Relocate utilities, appliances, and other vulnerable items to higher parts of the building. Use building materials that are resistant to flood damage. Buy flood insurance.

Preventing flood damage also involves paying attention to the watershed that drains into a stream. When farm land and forests are converted to roof tops and parking lots, less water soaks in and more rain runs off into streams and rivers. When soggy spots are graded to improve drainage, they no longer store the water and runoff increases. Smart design and stormwater management practices can prevent the increased flood hazards that could otherwise result from more water reaching the streams faster.

Because flooding is a recurring event, now is the time to start thinking about the next flood and taking whatever steps are possible to reduce your vulnerability to flood damage.

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