

# Letter to Branches

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General Secretary: Billy Hayes ([www.billyhayes.co.uk](http://www.billyhayes.co.uk))

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To: All Branches

Dear Colleagues,

## **Flooding - Advice to Safety Representatives & Branches - : "What to do and How to Stay Safe in a Flood & after a Flood"**

Further to LTB 580/07 issued on 27 June 2007 the Health, Safety & Environment Department is issuing the following advice for Safety Representatives in Flood affected areas. The advice and guidance has been compiled in conjunction with the Government's Environment Agency (who have issued further flood warnings across many parts of Britain) and the UK Fire and Rescue Service (in respect of what to do prior to re-occupation of their premises after flood and storm damage): -

### **Before and during Floods - the Workplace - Commercial Premises and Vehicles:**

- Be pro-active if you are in a flood affected area or one in which a "Flood Warning" has been issued and be prepared. The better prepared you are, the better you'll cope with the effects of flooding. Don't underestimate the damage a flood can do and don't wait for floods to happen. Flooding can occur very quickly and if you aren't prepared now, you may not have time to get ready once the flooding starts.
- Listen out for local news reports, updates and warnings on radio and TV.
- Check weather reports for your area.
- Bear in mind the areas where the Environment Agency has issued "Severe Flood Warnings" or "Flood Warnings" (See Flood Warning Codes below).
- Ensure that the Environment Agency, Local Authority and Emergency Services advice is followed by members.
- Phone the Environment Agency's Floodline on 0845 988 1188 for more information.
- Remain aware of the Environment Agency's "Flooding updates" (see below) and identify high risk areas and safety concerns.
- Try to work jointly with local Management. Initiate discussions with management person in control regarding the employer's "Major Incident Plan" ensuring it's fit for purpose and that as a CWU Safety Rep, you are consulted and involved in the decision making process in line with your entitlement under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations.
- Jointly with local Management liaise with Emergency "Blue-Light" Services and local authorities as the workplace may be evacuated in the event of a flood.
- Ensure members are jointly briefed and receive sufficient information and instructions.
- Be ready to turn off gas and electricity (get help if needed). Unplug electrical items and move them upstairs if possible.
- If floods occur then the bottom line is that under no circumstances should members' safety be jeopardised. Advise members that Floods can kill and that they should remember that several people have lost their lives during the current floods.

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- Stay out of flood waters they are unsafe! Advise members not to try to walk, wade or swim through floodwater - If on foot you can easily lose your footing and six inches of fast flowing water can knock a person over. Manhole covers may have come off in flood water and there may be other hazards you can't see beneath the floodwater surface. People should also never try to swim through fast flowing water - they may get swept away or be struck by an object in the water.
- Members should never try to drive through floodwater - two feet of water will float a car or van away – even if you are in a large goods vehicle it can still be swept away. Avoid contact with floodwater - it may be contaminated with sewage.
- Once flooding occurs, don't travel unless you have to.

### **After the Floods - Flood Recovery Information - Workplaces and Commercial Premises**

- Prior to re-occupation of the workplace premises that have been flooded ensure they are jointly inspected. A risk assessment must be undertaken to ensure the safety of all employees in the workplace.
- The premises will need to be dried out and thoroughly cleaned up. Flood waters damage materials, leave mud, silt, contamination from sewage, other unknown contaminants and promote the growth of mildew. The walls, floors, shelves, contents and any other flooded parts of the building should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and made safe in all respects to reduce these hazards and the damage they cause.
- If the premises have been flooded or water damage, the electrical and gas installations should be checked by a competent person prior to reconnection;
- Any electrical plant, machinery equipment which has been affected should not be used unless checked and verified safe by a competent person;
- If the heating system for the premises is affected it should be checked by a competent person before being brought back into use;
- If portable temporary heaters, space heaters etc are to be used to heat and dry out the premises, ensure that they are positioned in well ventilated areas away from combustible materials and positioned as to not endanger staff;
- The premises fire safety systems such as fire alarms, sprinklers or emergency lighting systems etc should be checked and tested by a competent engineer prior to the occupation of the premises;
- Any hazardous materials or substances on the premises which have been affected by water, should be quarantined and specialist advice obtained prior to disposal;
- Ensure that premises security has not been compromised;
- Damaged goods and equipment etc should be removed and stored away from any building in a secure place or in a secured skip;
- Check all fire exits and escape routes to ensure that they can be used prior to occupation;
- If the premises have structural damage which may be a danger as a result of flooding or storm damage, the Local Authority should be contacted prior to occupation.
- If you have any fire safety concerns, contact the local Fire Safety Department.
- If you have any unresolved health and safety concerns, contact the local authority Environmental Health Department or HSE depending on the appropriate enforcing authority.

### **Before and during Floods - in the home members should:-**

- Members should be made aware that there are 1.3 million properties at risk of flooding in England and Wales. One of them could be theirs!
- Do what you can now to prepare for a flood. Don't wait for the flood to happen. Floods can occur very quickly. If you aren't prepared now, you may not have time

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to get ready once the flooding starts. The better prepared you are, the better you'll cope with the effects of flooding.

- Don't underestimate the damage a flood can do - Check you have adequate flood cover on your home insurance. A recent Association of British Insurers (ABI) survey found that more than a quarter of British people did not have sufficient home insurance cover to mitigate against losses caused by flooding!
- Don't assume everyone knows what to do. Make a family flood plan and practice it. Do any neighbours need any help during a flood? - get organised.
- Listen to local Radio and TV for announcements. Check with Floodline on 0845 988 1188 whether there are specific flood warning arrangements for your area. Keep watching and listening. Stay alert; events can change very quickly during a flood. Keep an eye on the weather and listen out for warnings on the radio and TV.
- Keep a list of useful phone numbers somewhere you'll remember, e.g. your local council, the emergency services, your insurance company and the Environment Agency's Floodline number 0845 988 1188.
- Make a flood kit. Keep a torch, batteries, radio, and necessary medication, emergency numbers, rubber gloves and your insurance policy in a safe place, upstairs if possible.
- Move pets, vehicles, valuables and other items to safety. Move upstairs onto higher ground.
- Know how and where to turn off your gas and electricity supplies. If you're not sure, check with the Gas and Electricity companies. Mark the tap or switch with a sticker to help you remember.
- Get some sandbags (to block doors and airbricks but remember to ensure that there is adequate ventilation). Put sandbags or flood boards in place - but make sure your property is ventilated. Plug sinks/baths and put a sandbag in the toilet bowl to prevent backflow. Check in Yellow Pages under Builders Merchants for local suppliers or ask your local authority for advice. You can also make them yourself using old pillow cases or carrier bags and fill them with sand or earth.
- Do as much as you can in daylight. Doing anything in the dark will be a lot harder, especially if the electricity fails.
- If the flooding is serious the emergency services and your local authority may decide to evacuate you. Do exactly what they tell you. Remember to take supplies such as medication with you; you may be away from your home for a while.
- Don't drive through floodwater, your car may be swept away. Don't walk in floodwater, it can easily knock you off your feet. The water could have open manholes, road works or objects and you won't be able to see them.
- Don't walk on sea defences, riverbanks or cross river bridges if possible - they may collapse in extreme situations or you may be swept off by large waves. Beware of stones and pebbles being thrown up by waves.
- Members should check on elderly relatives and neighbours to see if they are ok.

#### **After the Floods - in the Home members should be advised:-**

- Protect yourself and your family from stress, fatigue and health hazards that follow a flood.
- Once it's safe to go back in, protect your home and contents from further damage.
- Some things are not worth repairing and some things may be too complicated or expensive to do by yourself - make the most of your time and money.
- Dry out your home - Flood waters damage materials, leave mud, silt and unknown contaminants and promote the growth of mildew. You need to dry your home to reduce these hazards and the damage they cause.
- Open doors and windows to ventilate the home. It takes a brick about a month to dry out, so take care to ensure your house is secure. Remember to

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unblock airbricks and doorways.

- Do watch out for any broken glass or nails while you're cleaning up.
- Wash taps and run them for a few minutes before use. Main tap water should not be contaminated but check with your local water company if you're concerned.
- Clean up - The walls, floors, shelves, contents and any flooded parts of your home should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- Don't touch items that have been in contact with the water. Flood water is likely to be contaminated and could contain sewage. Disinfect and clean thoroughly everything that is wet.
- If the premises have been flooded, don't turn any electrical items back on. Any domestic appliances or equipment i.e.. cookers, televisions, VCR's, washing machines etc which have been affected by water should not be used. Make sure they've dried out first. The electrical/gas installations should be checked by a competent person prior to reconnection. Contact the gas, electricity and water companies to get supplies checked before you turn them back on.
- Heating systems i.e.. gas boilers, oil boilers, storage heaters etc which have been affected by water should not be used unless checked by a competent person;
- Be vigilant where damaged household contents are left outside the property, including damaged vehicles which may be subject to theft or arson.
- If your premises are unoccupied, make sure that they are secure;
- If you are re-occupying the premises, ensure that your smoke alarms are working to ensure your safety;
- If you are using portable heaters take appropriate precautions in the use and siting of these appliances and to ensure the safety of your family. Portable heaters using gas, oil or paraffin etc should have adequate ventilation;
- If your premises has structural damage which may be a result of flooding or storm damage, you should contact the local authority prior to occupation.
- Prepare for the next flood - Protect yourself from the next flood - As mentioned above, make a family flood plan to avoid or minimise further damage. Don't think it can't happen again. Restock your supplies.
- Report the matter to your insurance company promptly - They'll need to get moving quickly.
- Check in the Yellow Pages under Flood Damage for suppliers of cleaning materials or equipment to dry out your property.
- Don't trust bogus traders. With so much damage to repair, it's tempting to take the first offer that comes along. Always check references and, if possible, get recommendations.

### **Flood Warning Codes:**

The flood warning code system consists of the following: -

- **Flood Watch** - Flooding of low lying land and roads is expected. Be aware, be prepared, watch out!
- **Flood Warning** - Flooding of homes and businesses is expected. Act now!
- **Severe Flood Warning** - Severe flooding is expected. There is extreme danger to life and property. Act now!
- **All Clear** - Flood Watches or Warnings are no longer in force for this area.

### **Flood Warning update information:**

To access the up to date information, check the status of your area and to see the flood warnings currently in force in your region, go to the Environment Agency Website - "Flooding update" at the following:

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- The Environment Agency Website - "Flooding update": <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/1796382/>
- The Environment Agency e-mail address is: [enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)
- The Environment Agency Floodline phone number is: **0845 988 1188 (24 Hour)**

Yours Sincerely

**Dave Joyce**  
**National Health, Safety & Environment Officer**

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