

# Flooding



## Are You Prepared?

### A Guide For Property Owners



2005 Edition

**City of Elmira**

-Department of Public Services

-Office of Community Development

317 E. Church Street

Elmira NY 14901

*<http://www.ci.elmira.ny.us>*



## **THE PROBLEM:**

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Elmira is subject to flooding from the following sources: the Chemung River, Newtown Creek, Diven Creek, Hoffman Creek, Heller Creek, and various storm drainage systems, both open and closed. During low water periods, most Elmira residents just accept the Chemung River and its tributaries as part of our City. Little thought is given to that time when it will, again, wreak havoc and despair on the area.

## **HISTORY OF FLOODING IN ELMIRA:**

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Elmira has experienced flooding in 1889, 1902, 1935, 1936, 1946, and most recently in 1972. As Frances Brayton wrote in the Chemung County Historical Journal after the 1972 flood, *“Rivers are like people. They have personalities of their own. A calm, placid, slow-flowing river will fill the onlooker with a feeling of quiet and rest. Just so, a raging torrent at flood tide fills one not only with terror, but a certain restlessness, that such creature should be allowed to give vent to its emotions unchecked.”* Many blame the massive destruction of the 1972 flood on inadequate warnings and insufficient information on dealing with flood problems for the general public. During June 22nd and 23rd, 1972, a total of 6.85 inches of rain fell. The community was unprepared to deal with the situation as readily as needed. Since that time, many steps have been implemented by the Federal, State, and local governments to minimize the risk of such an event in the future.

## **PURPOSE OF THIS PAMPHLET:**

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This pamphlet is meant to assist you on the types of services available and the steps you can take to protect your property, its contents and the lives of your family. As noted herein, the City is taking steps to minimize flood damage in the community, however several of the City’s efforts require your help and cooperation. Please read this pamphlet carefully and do what you can to help minimize flooding.



## **FLOOD WARNING SYSTEM:**

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A flood warning system, such as is present today, was not in effect when prior floods occurred in Elmira. The City’s Flood Warning System is a corporation made up of volunteer and professional people. They have established headquarters in the Corning Fire Station. Through the aid of computers, maps, rain and river gauges, they are able to forecast the river’s capacity to hold additional water. They report their predictions to the Chemung County Emergency Management Office, who issues River stage warnings to the radio and television stations as well as to the City Manager and the Mayor of the City of Elmira. The City of Elmira has a Flood Protection and Emergency Plan on file. This plan details the operating procedure to be followed by the various City departments and employees in reacting to such an emergency.



**DON'T DELAY! BE PREPARED TO EVACUATE IMMEDIATELY WHEN ORDERED TO DO SO!**

## **WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:**

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Citizens should watch and listen to the television and radio for warnings and up-to-date information and should be prepared to evacuate immediately when given notice to do so. If you have elderly or infirmed neighbors, please assist them as much as possible, or notify one of the human service agencies or City departments (see listing on last page) that there is a family in need of assistance. The Elmira Police Department and Fire Department will canvass areas subject to flooding, and by means of electronic warning signals and public address systems will notify residents to leave the area.

## **IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY:**

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You should prepare for evacuation by following these steps:

- Know the evacuation center and route to the center nearest you.
- Be cautious when driving at night. Avoid flood prone areas, washouts, bridges and downed power lines.
- Turn off gas, electric and water at shut-off.
- Open basement windows to let water in to equalize pressure.
- Take care of pets.
- Lock your house.
- Get valuable papers, documents, jewelry and family pictures packed.
- Get medications, extra footwear, and clothing packed.
- Move important items to higher floors.
- If possible, pack a flashlight, batteries, battery operated radio, blankets, ready to eat foods, safe drinking water, and infant supplies.
- Let close family members know that there is a chance that you may be relocated, and try to reassure them that you will be safe and in contact as soon as possible.

## **WHAT WE ARE DOING:**

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The City takes the threat of a flood seriously. It is the goal of the City to minimize flooding and protect our citizen's lives and properties. A copy of Elmira's Flood Protection Plan is at the Steele Memorial Library and at the City Clerk's Office in City Hall. It was prepared by a special flood committee to ensure that all activities within Chemung County and the surrounding areas are coordinated in an effective and timely manner. We continue to work with other agencies on updating our flood warning program, flood preparedness plan, and plan to control runoff from new developments in the watershed.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

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You can implement one or more flood protection measures, purchase flood insurance, and help the City in its flood protection activities. This pamphlet provides more details on these measures. Read this pamphlet carefully and keep it handy in case of a flood. If you are a property owner of a rental property, make sure your tenants are aware of protective measures they can take. Extra copies of this pamphlet are available, free of charge, at the following City offices: Fire Department, Community Development, and Public Services. It is also available online at <http://www.ci.elmira.ny.us>

## STREAM MAINTENANCE:

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Do not dump or throw anything into ditches, streams or other bodies of water. Dumping in our ditches, channels and streams is a violation of Section 11-42 and Section 29 of the City Code of Ordinances. A plugged channel cannot carry water, and when it rains the water has to go somewhere.

Every piece of trash can contribute to flooding. Even grass clippings and branches can accumulate and plug channels. If your property is next to a ditch, channel or stream, please do your part to keep the banks clear of brush and debris. The City has a stream maintenance program that inspects the channels regularly and can help you remove major blockages such as downed trees. If you notice someone dumping in these areas, notify the City's Department of Public Services at (607) 737-5750.

**The City of Elmira's Code of Ordinances allows NO DUMPING in ponds, brooks, natural waterways, or sewers. Violation of the Ordinance may result in a fine or imprisonment.**

## FLOOD HAZARD AREAS:

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The first flood map for the City of Elmira was prepared in 1984. Since that time many changes have occurred in the community and surrounding areas which have impacted on the City's Flood Hazard areas. In order to better understand the impact of these changes, the City commissioned The Sear-Brown Group to restudy the flood hazard area in Elmira. This study was accepted by the National Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and resulted in a new Flood Map being printed in April 1997 and a Letter of Map Revision dated December 28, 1999. This map (shown on the next page) indicates the approximate boundaries of Elmira's Flood Hazard Areas. This map shows the two types of flood hazard areas designated for the City: (1) the 100-year Flood plain, or high risk area; and (2) the 500-year Flood plain. This map is for general purposes only.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:

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The first thing you should do is check your flood hazard. For more specific information about your property and its risk of flooding contact the following agencies:

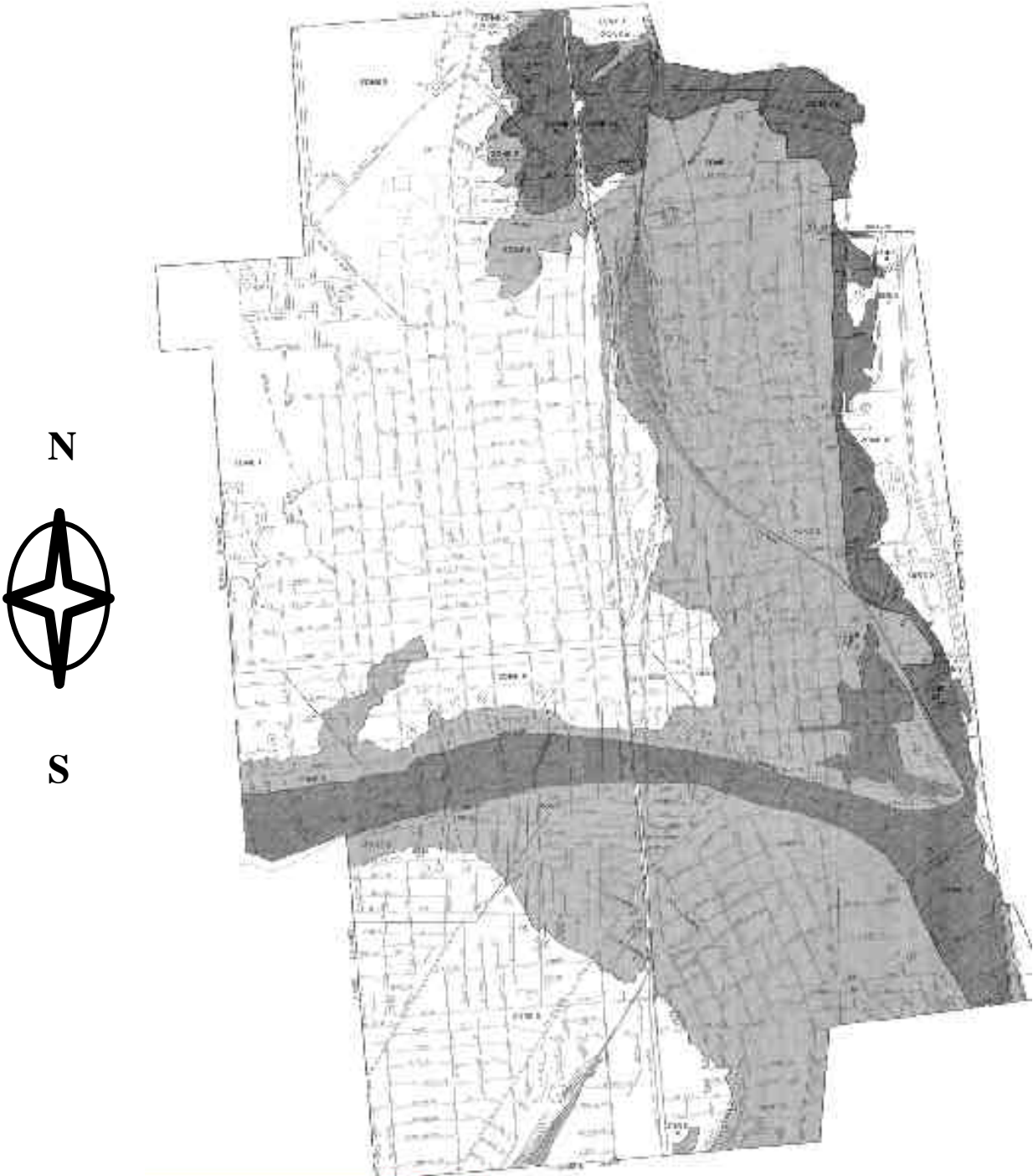
Department of Public Services	(607) 737-5750
Department of Inspection Services	(607) 737-5654
Chemung County Planning Department	(607) 737-5100

They can provide you information on your property's past history of flooding and whether or not you are in a mapped floodplain. This service is free of charge. If you are in a flood hazard area, this pamphlet can explain additional steps you can take

to minimize flooding (see sections on flood insurance, protecting yourself, and floodproofing and property protection measures). If you need help in understanding what you should do, contact one of the three departments listed above.

**THE FLOOD MAP:**

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**Dark Shaded Areas: 100 year Flood Area  
Light Shaded Areas: 500 year Flood Area**

Dated April 2, 1997  
Community Panel # 360150-0005-C

## **FLOODPLAIN DEVELOPMENT & PERMIT REGULATIONS:**

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No construction, including filling, can be allowed in the mapped floodway of the Chemung River without an engineering analysis that proves that the project will not increase flood damage or risk elsewhere. A permit is needed to ensure that projects do not cause problems on adjacent properties by diverting water. New buildings in the flood plain must be protected from flood damage. The City of Elmira code requires that new residential buildings must be elevated two feet above the base, or “100-year” flood area (shaded area shown on the map). New non-residential buildings must be elevated or floodproofed to a level two feet above the base flood elevation.

**Always check with Inspection Services before you build on, alter, regrade, or fill on your property if you are located in a flood hazard area.**

If you notice someone altering land or property in the floodplain without a permit visible, notify the Department of Inspection Services at (607) 737-5654.

## **SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENTS REQUIREMENTS:**

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The Code also requires that all substantial improvements to a building be treated as though it were new construction. A substantial improvement is when the value of an addition, alteration, repair or construction project exceeds fifty percent (50%) of the value of the existing building. In the case of an addition, only the addition must be protected. In the case of an improvement to the original building, the entire building must be protected.



*For example, if a house is flooded, has a fire, or is otherwise damaged so that the cost of repairs is more than 50% of the value of the building before the damage, then the house must be elevated to two feet above the base flood level.*

The City’s Office of Community Development has information on sources of financial assistance to help meet this requirement if you qualify. For more information Call (607) 737-5691 or on the web at <http://www.ci.elmira.ny.us>

## **PROTECTING YOURSELF:**

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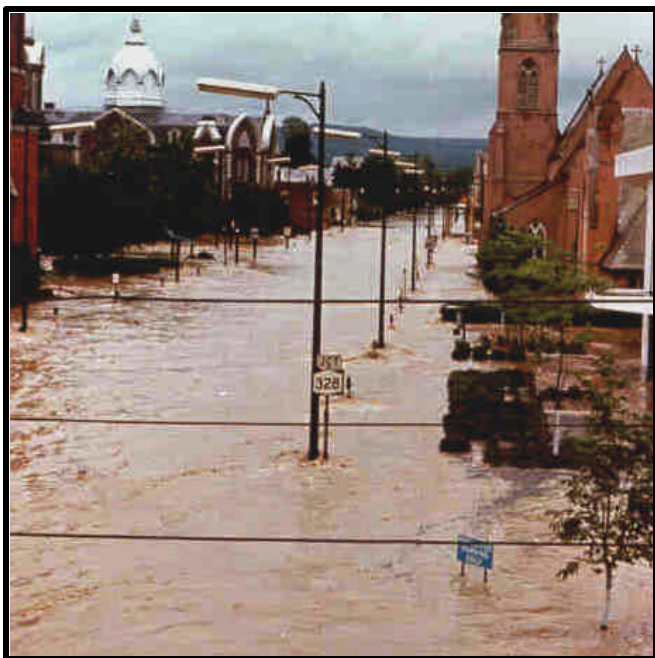
Rather than wait for a code requirement, you can act now to protect your property from flood damage. The first thing you need to know is your flood hazard. Contact the City’s Department of Public Services Office at (607) 737-5750 or the Chemung County Emergency Management Office at (607) 737-2096 to find out the following:

- How high would the 100-year flood be on your property?
- Will the flood go only in the basement or will it be over your first floor?
- How much warning time can you expect?
- How will you get the flood warning?
- Will your access or evacuation route be blocked by flooded streets?

## FLOODPROOFING AND PROPERTY PROTECTION MEASURES:

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There are several different ways to protect a building from flood damage. One way is to keep the water away by regrading your lot or building a small floodwall or earthen berm. (Note: any alteration to your building or land requires a permit from the Department of Inspection Services.) These methods work if your lot is large enough, if flooding is not too deep, and if your property is not in the floodway.



Another way is to make your walls waterproof and place watertight closures over the doorways. This method is recommended for houses with basements or if water will get over two feet deep.

Electrical panel boxes, furnaces, water heaters and washers/dryers should be elevated or relocated to a location less likely to be flooded. Many homes, even those not in the floodplain, have sewers that back up into the basement during heavy rains. Property owners are reminded that all subsurface drainage fixtures must be protected by a backflow preventor, check valve or shut-off valve to prevent sewerage backups into these fixtures. This is a requirement of the New York State Building Code and of the Chemung County Sewer Districts.

If flooding is likely, and time permits, move essential items and furniture to the upper floors of your home. Keep materials like sandbags, plywood, plastic sheeting and lumber handy for emergency waterproofing. This action will help minimize the amount of damage caused by floodwaters. There are also many good references on property protection and other flood safety topics available at the Steele Memorial Library.

**Inspection Services can make site visits and provide technical assistance to determine what types of improvements can be made to minimize flood damage**



## FLOOD INSURANCE:

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If you do not have flood insurance, talk to your insurance agent. Because the City of Elmira is a participant in the National Flood Insurance Program, you can purchase a separate Flood Insurance Policy backed by the Federal government. This insurance is available to both owners and tenants and is available even if you have been flooded in the past. All insurance agents sell the policy and all agents must charge the same rates. Your rates will not change just because you file a damage claim; they are set on a national basis.



Some people have purchased flood insurance because it was required by the bank when they got a mortgage or home improvement loan. Usually these policies just cover the building's structure and not the contents. During the kind of flooding that normally happens in Elmira, there is usually more damage to the furniture and contents than there is to the structure. **If you have a flood insurance policy, check out the amount and make sure it is adequate to protect you and your family for all the contents in your home.** Even if the past floods missed you or you have done some floodproofing, the next flood could be worse. Flood insurance also covers all surface floods. The City urges persons who live or own property in flood hazard areas to purchase flood insurance to protect themselves from losses due to flooding.



The City also participates in the Community Rating System (CRS) program which provides additional reductions in the amount of flood insurance premiums paid by our residents. The City has achieved a Class "8" rating which entitles all residents to a 10% reduction in their flood insurance premiums.



### TAKE NOTE:

**Standard Homeowners Insurance Policies DO NOT cover losses due to floods.**



## FLOOD SAFETY MEASURES:

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Together we can attempt to make Elmira free of another catastrophic flooding event, however, if the worst happens... and most likely it will... there are a number of Flood Safety Measures which you and your family should follow. Review these with every member of your household. Keep this pamphlet handy and refer to it frequently. By following several important rules, you and your family will be safe.

- **Do not walk through flowing water.** Drowning is the number one cause of flood deaths. Currents can be deceptive – six inches of moving water can knock you off your feet. Use a pole or stick to ensure that the ground is still there before you go through an area where the water is flowing.
- **Do not drive through a flooded area.** More people drown in their cars than anywhere else. Don't drive around road barriers; the road or bridge may be washed out.
- **Stay away from power lines and electrical wires.** The number two killer after drowning is electrocution. Electrical currents can travel through water. Report downed power lines to NYSEG or the County's Emergency Management Office.
- **Have your electricity turned off by NYSEG.** Some appliances, such as television sets, keep electrical charges even after they have been unplugged. Don't use appliances or motors that have gotten wet unless they have been taken apart, cleaned and dried.
- **Look out for animals.** Small animals that have been flooded out of their homes may seek shelter in yours. Use a pole or stick to poke and turn things over and scare away small animals.
- **Look before you step.** After a flood, the ground and floors are covered with debris including broken bottles and nails. Floors and stairs that have been covered with mud can be very slippery.
- **Be alert for gas leaks.** Use a flashlight to inspect for damage. Don't smoke or use candles, lanterns, or open flames unless you know that the gas has been turned off and the area has been well ventilated.
- **Carbon monoxide exhaust kills.** Use a generator or other gasoline powered machines outdoors. The same goes for camping stoves. Charcoal fumes are especially deadly – cook with charcoal outdoors.
- **Clean everything that got wet.** Flood waters have picked up sewage and chemicals from roads, factories, farms and storage buildings. Spoiled food, flooded cosmetics and medicines can be health hazards. When in doubt, throw them out.
- **Do Not Drink the Water.** Flood waters can contaminate drinking water. Do not use tap water for drinking or cooking during times of flood until you are notified by the appropriate authorities that the water is safe for human consumption. Use bottled water or water you have stored prior to the emergency being declared.
- **Take Good Care of Yourself.** Recovering from a flood is a big job. It is tough on both the body and the spirit and the effects a disaster has on you and your family may last a long time. Recognize and care for anxiety, stress, and fatigue.

## NATURAL AND BENEFICIAL FUNCTIONS:

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The City's storm drain system carries untreated storm water runoff directly to creeks and rivers. Improper pouring of wastes into storm drains impacts on the environment. Oil, paint, fertilizer, and pesticides pollute the water, destroy plants, endanger wildlife, and affect drinking water. Maintaining high water quality standards has many benefits: we have clear water in our rivers for drinking, wildlife and recreation; storm drainage facilities that are free of sediment and trash require less treatment and maintenance and thus save taxpayers money.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP:

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- Properly store and dispose of oils, chemicals, antifreeze and other toxic materials. Call the Chemung County Solid Waste and Recycling Office at (607) 737-2980 for more information on the proper disposal of these items.
- Never dump any waste in the storm drain. Dispose of litter and animal waste in a trash can. Sweep sidewalks, gutters, driveways and other paved surfaces and put the debris in a trash can.
- Never dispose of grass clippings, brush, yard waste or other materials in any stream, channel, or waterway.

## IMPORTANT RESOURCES:

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Police, Fire, Emergency	911
Chemung County Emergency Management Office	(607) 737-2096
City of Elmira, Department of Inspection Services	(607) 737-5654
City of Elmira, Department of Public Services	(607) 737-5679
- 24 Hour Service Line	(607) 737-5750
City of Elmira, Office of Community Development	(607) 737-5691



### On the Web:

#### City of Elmira

- <http://www.ci.elmira.ny.us>
- Public Services
- Community Development
- Inspection Services
- Building Permit Applications
- Flood Pamphlets

#### Chemung County

- <http://www.chemungcounty.com>
- Office of Emergency Management
- Chemung County Planning Department
- Solid Waste Management

#### FEMA – Federal Emergency Management Agency

- <http://www.fema.gov>
- Emergency assistance information
- Flood Maps
- Flood Insurance Information
- Flood Preparation Information

#### Ready.gov

- <http://www.ready.gov>
- Disaster Preparation