

Emergency Response **To Flood Threats in California**

Flood Operations Branch
Department of Water Resources
Division of Flood Management

During the flood season, a number of public agencies combine their efforts to provide high water warnings and minimize flood damage in California. The Department of Water Resources (DWR) is responsible for coordinating local, State and federal flood operations. The State-Federal Flood Operations Center, located on El Camino Avenue in Sacramento, is the focal point of this effort. State, federal and local flood operations on the North Coast streams are coordinated through the DWR Eureka Flood Center in Humboldt County.

The National Weather Service (NWS) Sacramento Forecast office is located adjacent to the Flood Operations Center. This office uses satellite pictures, computer models, and other data to prepare weather forecasts. Climatic and stream flow data are measured by a network of federal, State, local, and private gages located throughout California. These data, along with reservoir operations information, are collected by the California Data Exchange Center (CDEC). CDEC data is used by the NWS California-Nevada River Forecast Center and by the DWR Flood Forecasting Section to produce joint river forecasts during flood season. These forecasts are available to local agencies through the CDEC computer network. In addition, the Flood Operations Center uses flood information and the forecasts to notify interested parties when river levels are forecast to rise to pre-determined warning levels.

As river flows are forecasted to rise above the predetermined levels, the Flood Operations Center responds quickly by increasing its staff and extending its operating hours as necessary. Flood information is made available from the Flood Operations Center to cooperating agencies emergency managers, the news media, DWR management and the general public. This information is also used to coordinate the operation of flood control facilities under the jurisdictions of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, DWR and local agencies. The Corps of Engineers has jurisdiction over storage capacity seasonally reserved for flood control on most major reservoirs throughout the State. The Corps of Engineers also provides federal assistance when flood emergency demands exceed State and local resources.

Cal EMA coordinates the civil defense efforts of federal, State and local agencies during periods of disaster or emergency. Cal EMA also maintains a liaison with the Flood Operations Center during all flood emergencies. When flood threats are identified by on-site patrols or others, and the responsible local agency requests help, supplies, equipment, specialists and/or flood fight crews may be dispatched to the area by the Flood Operations Center. The effort is managed through the DWR Incident Command System in the field.

When the incident appears to potentially exceed the resources of the responsible agency, the State, DWR and the Corps of Engineers will conduct on-site evaluations. If the incident is determined by DWR to be an immediate threat beyond the resources of the responsible agency and the State, and if the Corps determines that the incident meets the criteria of its legislative mandate, the Corps assumes total management of the subsequent flood fight for that incident.

All flood fight activities are coordinated under the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). SEMS is intended to standardize response to emergencies involving multiple jurisdictions or multiple agencies.

Storm Monitoring. From about October 15 to May 1, forecasting teams from the State-Federal Flood Operations Center continuously monitor river stages and weather conditions to ensure the Center's awareness of any high water potential. The teams also prepare forecasts as required, and alert off-duty Department personnel to changing conditions.

Flood Alert. When a severe storm pattern or other flood potential develops, the Chief of Flood Operations may declare a Flood Alert. Under the direction of the Chief of Flood Operations, the Flood Center is then activated on extended hours. Initial activation of the Center is accomplished by combined staff of the DWR Flood Operations Branch and the Forecasting Section, National Weather Service River Forecast Center personnel, and when applicable, the Media & Public Information Branch of the Public Affairs Office. Additional personnel, when required, are obtained from the DWR Division of Flood Management and other DWR Divisions.

Flood Mobilization. As severe storm activities continue, requiring resources beyond the capability of the Division of Flood Management, the Director, upon the recommendation of the Chief of the Division of Flood Management, may declare a Flood Mobilization. When Flood Mobilization is declared, the Chief of Flood Operations is authorized to use any Department personnel and expenditures beyond budgeted funds of the Flood Operations Center.

State of Emergency. Only the Governor can declare a State of Emergency. Cal EMA is the designated coordinator during a State of Emergency and assigns functions to State agencies to be performed preceding and during an emergency through prearranged Administrative Orders. DWR is the agency charged with providing expertise for flood emergency response.