

Will my property be safe during flood events?

By Hans Scholl, Town of Barrington Resilience & Energy Committee

We've made it! Barrington has gone through 2022 without a major storm event. We were lucky. In the same year Florida saw devastating impact from Hurricane Ian, we had the ten year anniversary of Superstorm Sandy, and one third of Pakistan flooded. The world's climate changes. Weather events are getting more severe and the sea level is rising. On our Barrington shoreline the water is almost one foot higher than in 2000. It will continue to rise by an estimated additional foot by 2050 to six feet rise by 2100.

What does that mean for each of us? How will we, and our properties be impacted? How can we best prepare? The answer is sobering and hopeful at the same time. While we cannot avoid the impact of future storms and floods, there are ways to minimize it, to protect ourselves and our properties, and to recover faster.

For your property, find out about flood impact by visiting the RI Coastal Resources Management Council's "Stormtools" website. The "Beginners" page¹ shows if your property is vulnerable to a storm surge, how deep the water will be during a 100-year coastal storm, and if the projected sea level rise will affect your property.

The "Advanced" page provides predictions for "nuisance floods" (1, 3, 5, and 10 year recurrence intervals) and for 25, 50, and 100 year storm events. Flood maps are also available for sea level rise of 1 to 12 feet on its own as well as combined with storm events, and for major hurricanes in the past.

It helps to gain a basic familiarity with the related terms. The longer the recurrence interval (e.g. 5, 25, 100 years), the more severe the storm and flood level will be. A "100 year flood event" means that every year there is statistically a one percent chance that such an event will happen. It does NOT mean that this flood would occur only every 100 years, or 100 years from now, as much as we are tempted to wish for it.

It's like rolling a dice. If you do it often enough, you will find that—on average—there is a one in six (17%) chance for each of the numbers to show up. And yet, a specific number can appear three times in a row or not at all for a very long time. This is the same for the flood events in each of the categories: a 100 year storm can happen several times in a century, and even more than once in a single year. It would be a mistake to let our guard down because of misunderstanding this reality.

While being on the Stormtools website you may realize that even during a 25 year coastal storm, Barrington will break up into several islands until the flood recedes. If your property is on one of them, you will have to evacuate early because you will be surrounded by water during the height of the storm. In addition, the town center will flood early, making last minute shopping of food or any other emergency items impossible.

There is really no need to wait to the last minute. The RI Emergency Management Agency website² contains a wealth of information to get prepared ahead of time: checklists for a disaster supply kit, flood and hurricane preparedness guides, an evacuation plan & checklist guide, the evacuation map for Barrington and the location of cooling and warming centers in town. For reducing the flood risk to your building, a number of improvements can be made³. And the RI Coastal Property Guide contains comprehensive information for owners of properties in flood zones⁴.

So, while we hope that the new year will not see major storm or flood events, let's not only keep our optimism high, but act NOW and get prepared, using these resources.

For questions, advice and information about potential financial incentives, contact the Town's Planning Department at 401-247-1900 x347.

¹ Search for "Stormtools for Beginners" or enter this URL: <https://stormtools-for-beginners-crc-uri.hub.arcgis.com/>. In the grey box at the bottom right of the map are menus and tools, including a magnifier symbol to search for your property by street address.

² <https://riema.ri.gov/planning-mitigation/resources-rhode-island-citizens>

³ Reducing Flood Risk to Residential Buildings That Cannot Be Elevated; FEMA P-1037 / September 2015

⁴ <https://climatechange.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur481/files/documents/rhode-island-coastal-property-guide-2014.pdf>