Weather Wise

Floods

Floods and flash floods might not capture your attention like tornadoes, lightning, or large hail, but they claim more lives than any other storm-related hazard. Just a few inches of moving water—even slow-moving water—can knock you off your feet!

Many floods are caused when rain falls too quickly for waterways to carry away the runoff. Small waterways, such as creeks and small streams, can be overwhelmed within hours or even minutes by heavy rainfall from slow-moving thunderstorms. These events are called "flash floods." Other floods are caused when rain falls nearly continuously for many days or weeks, saturating the soil, or from spring snowmelt. Either situation is very dangerous!

In Oklahoma, many floods and flash floods occur at night, making them especially dangerous. You can stay safe by monitoring your favorite news source or NOAA Weather Radio. If you are caught outside in a flooding situation, get to higher ground. In a car, avoid flooded roads, especially if the water is moving. Remember: it only takes one foot of water to float a vehicle. Turn Around, Don't Drown!

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Activity: Use the information above to answer these questions.

1. Thunderstorms dumped three inches of rainfall during one day into two separate stream basins—one is a local creek and another is a major river. Which waterway is more likely to flood more quickly? Why?

2. Slow-moving thunderstorms or "training" thunderstorms (they line up and follow each other like boxcars on a train) can drop too much rain in a small area. Why do you think "training" thunderstorms pose such a flood threat?

3. Weather hazards—especially floods—are extremely tough to recognize at night. What are some ways to monitor nighttime flooding and other hazardous weather situations?

4. Describe why a foot of water moving at 2 mph can displace people and cars while 40 mph winds cannot? Think about the differences in density between these two fluids (water and air).

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