

# What You Need to Know About Flood Insurance

**Does my homeowner's insurance cover flood damage?** NO. The standard homeowner or commercial policy does not cover damage caused by flooding (rising waters). To protect your property you must buy a flood insurance policy. Flood insurance can cover the structure alone or cover a combination of the structure and contents. Renters can buy coverage for contents, even if the owner does not have structural coverage. A house has a higher percentage of flooding than suffered from a fire, yet many homeowners do not complain about carrying fire insurance. There is normally a 30-day waiting period before flood insurance goes into effect; it is essential to plan ahead. Contact your local insurance agent to get a flood insurance policy.

**How much does flood insurance cost?** The average flood insurance premium in Georgia is less than \$500 per year. Contact your insurance agent to determine exact cost.

**If I rent my home, can I buy any form of flood insurance?** YES. Renters can obtain coverage for their personal belongings and the contents of their home, even if owner of the property does not insure the home itself.

**If I live in a low risk area and my insurance agent says I do not need flood insurance what should I do?** Many times homeowners and renters are misinformed. Flooding can occur outside the high risk area. In Savannah, of the reported 1700 flooded structures, 53% of the buildings were in the Low risk area. Many home owners in a low-lying coastal region like Chatham County could benefit from flood insurance.

**When is flood insurance required?** Anyone can buy flood insurance but it is required in certain conditions. If you buy a house in a designated high-risk flood zone and receive a mortgage loan from a federally regulated or insured lender, your lender is legally bound to require you to maintain flood insurance.

**Will Federal disaster assistance pay for flood damage?** Federal disaster assistance is available only if the President declares a disaster. Typically, assistance is a loan that must be repaid with interest. Following a Federal disaster declaration



some financial assistance is available, but usually for only short-term housing and not repairs. Flood insurance is the only sure way to be reimbursed for some of your flood losses. For more information contact your community flood plan representative listed on the Point of Contacts Table on the flood map.

**What does the City and County do to make flood insurance more affordable?** Because the City of Savannah and Chatham County participate in the National Flood Insurance Program, subscribe to the Community Rating System program and have highly rated flood management programs, homeowners here receive special flood insurance premium discounts not available to homeowners living in neighboring jurisdictions. This means that if you live within the City of Savannah or Unincorporated Chatham County, you are eligible for a discount on their flood insurance premiums. The UCC saved 11,799 flood insurance policy holders in the SFHA a total of \$3,098,642 on premiums last year, or an average of \$263 per policy. The COS saved 2,581 SFHA policy holders \$679,771 or an average of \$263 per policy.

**What is Freeboard and how does it benefit me?** Freeboard is a safety provision that refers to elevating a structure's lowest level a few feet above predicted flood elevations (generally 1-3 feet). Storm waters can and do rise higher than shown on Flood Insurance Rate Maps. Freeboard helps protect buildings from storms larger than those that Flood Insurance Rate Maps are based on, and provides an added margin of safety

to address the flood modeling and mapping uncertainties associated with Flood Insurance Rate Maps. Because the risk of flooding is reduced significantly, Freeboard results in much lower flood insurance premiums. Freeboard is required by both the flood ordinances of the City of Savannah and Chatham County.

**What is the Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA)?** The Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) protects coastal areas that serve as barriers against wind and tidal forces caused by coastal storms, and serve as habitat for aquatic species. CBRS boundaries are established and mapped by the U.S. Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) which only Congress can revise CBRS boundaries. To manage development, limit property damage, and preserve wildlife and natural resources, CBRA restricts Federal financial assistance, including disaster relief assistance provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) under the Robert T. Stafford Act and the NFIP. The NFIP cannot provide flood insurance coverage for structures built or substantially improved after the area is designated as a CBRS unit (initial designations went into effect October 1, 1983). Minimum NFIP floodplain management standards do not prohibit the rebuilding of substantially damaged buildings in CBRS units. However, such structures must meet the community's floodplain management regulations, and NFIP coverage is not available for such structures. Lenders should exercise special care with properties in or near these areas.

**When and why do FIRM change?** Maps change as money becomes available from congress or a local government performs a detailed study. Developers can produce Letter of Map Amendments (LOMA) in the course of the permitting process. Chatham County has seen maps changes throughout the years to include 2008, 2013 and 2014. Georgia Department of

Natural Resources (DNR) continues to update the maps under the Risk Map program that is currently addressing costal surge inundation for thirteen counties along the Georgia coast. The project is on track for the new maps to take effect in 2016. See the next question and the web site <http://www.georgiadfirm.com/CSLF.html#> for additional information.

**What happens if my property changes from low-risk to high-risk because of new Flood Insurance Rate Maps?** With new maps, you will likely be required to protect your building and its contents with flood insurance if you have a mortgage. Flood insurance rates for high-risk areas are higher, but there are ways to save money with the National Flood Insurance Program "Grandfather Rule". Under NFIP administrative grandfathering, Post-FIRM buildings in the Regular Program built in compliance with the floodplain management regulations in effect at the start of construction will continue to have favorable rate treatment even though higher Base Flood Elevations (BFEs) or more restrictive, greater risk zone designations result from Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) revisions. Buildings constructed in compliance with earlier maps or continuously covered by flood insurance stay in their original rate class when maps change or properties are sold. See [www.FEMA.Gov](http://www.FEMA.Gov) for more information or contact your local insurance advocate.

**Is there any help to bring non-conforming, flooding structure into compliance with local ordinances?** Yes. Increased Cost of Compliance Coverage is now available through the National Flood Insurance Program and pays up to \$30,000 to help property owners bring a non-compliant structure into compliance with our Flood Damage Protection Ordinance. The structure must have flood insurance, be within the designated "High Risk" flood zone and the community must declare the structure to be substantially damaged or repetitively flooded. Increased Cost of Compliance Coverage claims will only be paid on flood-damaged homes and businesses, and can only be used to pay for costs of meeting the floodplain management ordinance in our community. Increased Cost of Compliance Coverage is part of the maximum \$250,000 payout set by the National Flood Insurance Program. For more information on ICC coverage, call your insurance company or agent, or call the National Flood Insurance Program toll-free at 1-800-427-4661.

For More Information Please Contact Your Local Insurance Advocate:

Jeff Brady  
[JeffBrady@allstate.com](mailto:JeffBrady@allstate.com)  
 5859 Abercorn St., STE 1, Savannah, GA 31405  
 Office: 912-356-3815  
[www.rountreebradyinsurance.com](http://www.rountreebradyinsurance.com)