

“Knowledge is power.”

*Francis Bacon*

**“The Dry Facts: Protecting your Home from Flood-Related Damage”**

Milwaukee County Produces Flood Proofing Video

*June 22, 1997*

“Southeastern Wisconsin did its best to bail out Saturday from the worst downpour in more than a decade – a deluge that swamped basements and business districts, forced hundreds of people from their homes, closed major highways and claimed one life.”



*Rick Romell and  
Tom Vanden Brook  
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

The confluence of two rivers and urban development in the Milwaukee County area contributes to the likelihood of flooding after heavy rains, like the seven inches of rain that inundated various parts of Milwaukee and its suburbs on June 20, 1997.

As basements dried and Milwaukee residents discarded water-soaked belongings, it was evident that flood-proofing work needed to be done in regards to these saturated homes and basements. Even a rain of two inches over several hours can produce conditions for flooding in Milwaukee County, said Carl Stenbol, Assistant Director for Milwaukee County Division of Emergency Management.

After the June '97 storm, emergency management staff began developing ideas to better educate homeowners about preventing flooding and sewer backup damages. The disaster declaration the county received in response to the \$78 million in damages enabled the department to apply for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funds through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Wisconsin Division of Emergency Management (WEM).

“Citizens were asking questions on how they could protect themselves, their property and belongings prior to actual flooding,” said Midge Casperson, Milwaukee County Municipal Emergency Service Coordinator and project coordinator/producer for the community outreach video.

**Sharing the Knowledge**

Mitigation techniques previously developed and tested could provide the answers to these homeowners' questions. But the challenge was how to get that information to the citizens of Milwaukee County.

“We wanted to put it in a format that was easy to understand and implement, and in a way that was accessible to our citizens,” said Casperson.

The staff felt that visual demonstrations provide the best form of teaching. A “mitigation” video production was begun involving script development, actors, and technical expertise. While the county knew it would be a costly undertaking, state emergency management officials helped to determine that the HMGP was a perfect match.

The Milwaukee County received a grant of \$30,000 from HMGP to produce the video and a corresponding brochure. The final cost of production totaled \$40,000. The state and county each matched a \$5,000 contribution.

## Video How-to

Utilizing experts, taking a hands-on approach throughout the entire production schedule, and having a plan for distribution were the successful elements of the project.



“I depended on the production people for what they are best in and researched with mitigation experts, like the Wisconsin mitigation officer and local municipal public works, to get the most up-to-date

information and make it a well-rounded video on all aspects of flood-proofing. I worked closely with the production company every step of the way to ensure the accuracy of the content,” said Casperson.

County-wide distribution included involving the Milwaukee Federated Library system that encompasses 19 libraries in the City of Milwaukee and the surrounding suburbs. “Librarians told me they had a hard time keeping the video on the shelf,” Casperson said.

Other avenues of distribution and coverage were:

- Village halls and city administrators
- Newspaper stories relating to the video availability
- Local home improvement show featuring how-to segments from the video

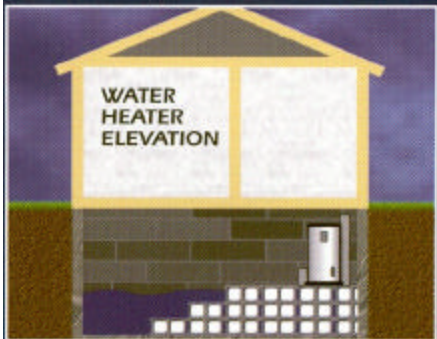
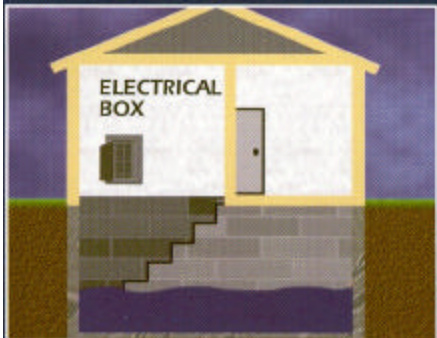
Timing helped make the video a success, in a rather unfortunate way. The video debuted after the county experienced its second 100-year flood event within two years. People were eager to implement protective measures against further flooding damage after basements flooded a *second* time in two years. The video was able to lay out mitigation suggestions in a very understandable format.

*For more information on mitigation in the state of Wisconsin, please contact Roxanne Gray, State Hazard Mitigation Officer, by phone at (608) 242-3211 or email at [grayr@dma.state.wi.us](mailto:grayr@dma.state.wi.us). For more information about the Wisconsin Division of Emergency Management, see [www.state.wi.us/agencies/dma](http://www.state.wi.us/agencies/dma).*

For information on ordering a copy of the video or for more information on this project, contact Midge Casperson at (414) 278-4709. You can also check out the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Department web page at [www.mksheriff.org](http://www.mksheriff.org).

### A Video Sampling

Colorful, instructive graphics and easy-to-understand definitions of flood terminology and flood proofing techniques were used in the video and a sampling of the information was printed in a brochure. Here are a few examples:



#### Base Flood Elevation (BFE)

The highest point floodwaters are expected to reach under normal rainfall events in your area. Once that is determined you can begin elevating items susceptible to water damage *above that mark*. It's generally recommended that you elevate these items at least 12 inches above your BFE. Check your local floodplain ordinance.

#### Flood Protection Level

The level of flooding that you want your house to be able to withstand without structural damage or damage to personal belongings. Depending on where your home is located, even within the same neighborhood, your flood protection level may be higher or lower. Local building officials will be able to provide you with information and tell you what options are available to you in your particular situation.

Captions:

Caption 1: Milwaukee County experienced two one-hundred-year flood events within two years, in 1997 and in 1998. This Milwaukee neighborhood experienced severe flooding in the 1998 flooding event.

Caption 2: A segment of the video explains, “Sawhorses and an old board work well to elevate small appliances and knickknacks.”

Caption 3: “Be sure to route rain water far away from the foundation.”

Caption 4: “A NOAA weather radio with an emergency alarm can give you enough time in a weather emergency to protect you and your family. Get one!”

Caption 5: “Raising or moving your appliances and electrical box can save them from flood-related damage.”