

## FLOODING IN WEST BATON ROUGE PARISH

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### 2007 Floods

2007 remains a time of recovery for many areas devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. Those who lost everything in the flood can tell you about the need for flood insurance.

The 2007 hurricanes have thus far stayed far from our shores; however, we cannot become complacent.....we must always be prepared.

### Local Flood Hazard

The immense Bayou Choctaw floodplain is responsible for much of the riverine flooding in West Baton Rouge Parish. Located in the western portion of the parish, backwater from this stream will cover an estimated 33% of the total parish land area during the 100-year flood.

Although floods in the Bayou Choctaw basin are frequent, they are seldom serious. This is due to the basin maintaining its natural and beneficial function of storing stormwater. It is important that development does not restrict flow nor create a significant impact by reducing storage through fill or levees.

Predicted 100 year flood elevations are established throughout the Bayou Choctaw floodplain. This information is available in the Parish Council Office. The 100 year flood is about 1 ½ feet higher than the flood of January, 1993.

Historically, Bayou Choctaw flooding has been created by heavy rainfalls exceeding 10 inches over a couple of days. The water rises fairly rapidly (usually less than a day), stays near its peak for a few days, then starts a slow recession over the next couple of weeks.

Flooding in other areas of West Baton Rouge Parish are created by stormwater crossing US Highway 190 and in low lying areas between the major drainage canals. Historically, this type of flooding occurs during short duration, intense rainfalls over a small area.

Since the overbank area is flat and covers so much area, the flood waters are generally quite shallow but widespread. So parish ordinances require all new construction to be elevated above natural ground.

### Flood Warning System

Four items are used in a flood warning system. A **Flood Watch** means flooding is possible. A **Flash Flood Watch** means a flash flood which can happen very quickly is possible. A **Flood Warning** means a flood is occurring or will occur soon, the flood may take several hours to develop. A **Flash Flood Warning** means a flash flood is occurring or will happen very soon.

These warnings are broadcast to the entire Baton Rouge metropolitan area when issued by the National Weather Service. Cablevision operators, network television stations, and radio stations are notified of these conditions. They are broadcast as received.

West Baton Rouge Parish is a member of the Community Alert Network. In anticipation of an emergency situation, individual endangered residences will be telephoned.

If your property is known to flood or is located in a flood hazard area, and flood warnings are issued, you should take appropriate steps to protect your property by sand bagging, turning off all electrical circuits and gas lines, and elevating furnishings, carpets, appliances and air conditioning compressors.

### Flood Safety

Keep alert to rapidly changing weather and to news bulletins.

Learn the safest route from your home or business to higher, safer ground, but stay tuned to reports of changing flood conditions.

If emergency officials tell you to evacuate or leave your home, go immediately to a safe shelter, hotel, or to a relative or friend's home. Turn off all utilities at the main switch - **BUT ONLY IF TIME PERMITS**. Do not touch any electrical equipment unless it is in a dry area. Every source of electricity can be dangerous during and after flooding.

If your car stalls in a flooded area, abandon it as soon as possible. Floodwater can sweep a car away.

Swimming or playing in or near floodwater is life threatening. Drainage ditches and canals carry fast-moving floodwater and are extremely dangerous. Explain this to your children.

Remember, **FLOODS ARE DECEPTIVE**. Try to avoid flooded areas, and do not attempt to walk through floodwater that is more than knee deep. Use a stick or pole to probe for deep water holes.

### Flood Insurance

We strongly recommend that you consider purchasing flood insurance. Most standard homeowner's insurance policies do not cover losses from flooding. Renters can also buy policies to protect their personal property.

Flood insurance up to \$250,000 is available to all homeowners whether you live in a flood zone or not. Talk to your insurance agent.

Do not wait until a flood is imminent as there is a 30-day waiting period.

Some people have purchased flood insurance because it was required when they obtained a mortgage or home improvement loan. Sometimes these policies just cover the building, but not the

contents. During the type of floods which occur in West Baton Rouge Parish, the primary damage is usually to furniture and contents. Check your policy to make certain that contents are included; if not, you should add this coverage.

West Baton Rouge Parish has done an excellent job in protecting its residents from the effects of frequently occurring storms, but there is no way that we can protect you from rare events such as the 100 year flood.

#### **Drainage System Maintenance**

It is illegal to dump debris in stream channels. Debris retards the water carrying capability of the channel. It can cause flooding or increase the damages during a flood period. Please contact the Parish Council Office at 225-383-4755 whenever you see debris in a channel or someone dumping into a channel. We are proud of the cleanliness of our channels - let's work together to keep them that way.

#### **Property Protection**

There are many things you can do to an existing building to minimize or eliminate the potential for flood damage.

Sandbags, plywood, plastic sheeting and lumber can be used to protect property temporarily. (Remember, sandbags should not be stacked directly against the outer walls of a building since wet bags may create added pressure on the foundation.)

Permanent flood proofing measures for flood prone structures are preferable to temporary ones. These permanent retrofitting methods include elevating the structure, building flood walls and closures, and protecting utilities.

#### **Permits**

Before proceeding with retrofitting, building repairs, or any construction check with the West Baton

Rouge Parish Office of Community Planning and Development (OCPD) in the WBR Parish Governmental Building or call 225-336-2434 for applicable building codes, permit requirements, and zoning restrictions. If a repair, improvements or remodeling project exceeds 25% of the building's market value, then the building must meet the same construction requirements as a new building.

Please contact the WBR Parish OCPD at 225-336-2434, if you know of anyone who is violating these requirements.

#### **Flooding Protection Assistance**

You can get information on retrofitting from the Parish Library. In addition to retrofitting booklets, the main library has publications on flood insurance, flood protection, and floodplain management.

The WBR Parish OCPD has the names of contractors and consultants knowledgeable or experienced in retrofitting techniques and construction, booklets on how to select a qualified contractor and what recourse people have if they are not satisfied with a contractor's performance. The Parish's OCPD office will review and critique your retrofitting plans to ensure that they offer sufficient protection against the predicted flood risks.

Floods are unpleasant events. Find out what your chances of flooding are by contacting the WBR Parish OCPD at 225-336-2434. The OCPD staff can provide assistance in determining the base flood elevation at your property. If your property is flood prone, then take appropriate steps to protect it against damage before the storm arrives.

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**ATTENTION:**

**RESIDENTS**

**OF**

**FLOOD ZONES**

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**West Baton Rouge Parish**