

Sandbags



In the event of a declared flooding emergency the Council is unable to respond to requests for sandbags. Experience has shown however that during severe storms roads may become blocked, and in many cases, there is also often very little warning of localised flash flooding.

It is wise therefore if you feel that you may be at risk from flooding, to have an emergency plan for your property, if possible working with neighbours. Indeed it is the responsibility of landowners to protect their properties from flooding. If sandbags form part of your emergency plan be aware that they have a limited shelf life. If you are making such provisions, therefore, it is wise to observe the following guidelines;

- Keep empty sandbags in stock. They can be obtained from several large builders' merchants. Keep them dry and in a convenient place, out of sunlight.
- Ensure that when calculating how many you will need you consider air bricks, doors leading off garages that may flood inside, cat flaps, low level letterboxes etc as well as obvious doors.
- Keep sand separate but be sure that you have the means at hand to fill the sandbags should they be required. Sand can again be purchased from builder's merchants and, again, should be kept dry and out of sunlight. This will help prevent the polythene from breaking down under ultraviolet light making the bags difficult to move when needed.
- When filling sandbags ensure that they are not overfilled. They become heavy quickly. Use appropriate personal protection equipment such as gloves etc and bear in mind that it is a two-person job unless you have prepared a frame to support the bags when filling them.
- Be aware that sandbags do seep water even when well stacked and trodden into place. Also consider whether water can get around your defences, for example around doorframes or under doorsteps. There are sealants available, again from builder's merchants and hardware stores that can be fitted at a convenient time well in advance of a problem. Always read the instructions on such products.
- If you have not purchased sandbags and sand in advance, you can use alternatives such as pillow cases or refuse sacks and fill them with garden soil.

Remember

- Sandbags, particularly after use, will rot or break down and become unusable over time.
- They may become contaminated and should be treated as such after use.
- They are much heavier when wet and should be handled with care.
- Builders' merchants may not be open or may have insufficient stocks when you need them.

More detailed advice on sandbags and other methods of damage limitation is Available from the Environment Agency Floodline on (0845) 988 1188.

How to fill and position sandbags

- Unless you have access to a sandbag filling machine, this is a two person job: one to hold the bag and one to fill.
- Sand is abrasive - both people should wear protective gloves.
- Do not fill bags more than half full. Remember that they can get heavy quickly, so do not over fill, or fill them too far away from where you need to position them.
- It is not necessary to tie the end of the bags.
- Remove any debris from the area where the bags are to be placed.
- Place the half-filled bags lengthways and parallel to the direction of the water flow. Tuck the opened end under the filled half of the bag and position it pointing into the water flow.
- Place bags in layers. Like a brick wall, make sure that in the next layer each bag overlaps the one below by half.
- Stamp bags firmly into place to eliminate gaps and create a tight seal.

Pyramid placement method

If you need to create a sandbag protection that is more than three layers high you will need to build in a pyramid style. For the structure to be stable, you should build the 'sandbag wall' three times as wide as you need it to be high. It will also be more effective if you alternate the layers lengthways and crosswise. Stamp each bag in place and tuck the loose end firmly under the filled portion of the bag.

Additional waterproofing

Lay plastic sheeting across the side of the 'sandbag wall' that will face the floodwater. Weigh down with additional sandbags.