Flood Safety Awareness Week

Turn Around Don't Drown (TADD)

Turn Around Don’t Drown, or TADD for short, is a NOAA National Weather Service campaign used to educate people about the hazards of driving a vehicle or walking through flood waters.

This year is the 10th anniversary of the TADD program. The phrase “Turn Around Don’t Drown” has become a catchphrase in the media, classroom, and even at home. It’s one thing to see or hear the phrase, and another to put it into practice.

Flooding is the 2nd leading cause of weather related fatalities in the U.S. (behind heat). On average, flooding claims the lives of 95 people each year. Most of these deaths occur in motor vehicles when people attempt to drive through flooded roadways. Tragically, two such vehicle-related flood fatalities occurred in northern New York during the passage of Tropical Storm Irene. Many other lives are lost when people walk into flood waters. This happens because people underestimate the force and power of water, especially when it is moving. The good news is most flooding deaths are preventable with the right knowledge.

Just six inches of fast-moving water can knock over an adult. Only eighteen inches of flowing water can carry away most vehicles, including large SUVs. It is impossible to tell the exact depth of water covering a roadway or the condition of the road below the water. This is especially true at night when your vision is more limited. It is never safe to drive or walk through flood waters.

The science behind a vehicle being swept away involves two factors: lateral forces of the flowing water pushing against the vehicle, and buoyancy of the vehicle in water.

Water flowing at 6 to 12 mph will push against a medium sized car or SUV with 500 to 700 pounds of force for each foot the water rises. As the speed of the water increases, the force exerted grows exponentially. Rising water will also make your vehicle buoyant. A foot of water will impart 1500 pounds of lift on an average sized vehicle. In effect your car will weigh 1500 pounds less. The combination of buoyancy and lateral force of the water makes driving even an SUV into a flooded road a risky, life threatening proposition.

The other consideration is the road itself. Even if you think the water is very shallow, the road may no longer be there. Rapidly flowing water can scour a roadbed away, and leave a weakened road surface or a large hole that could easily swallow a vehicle.

Any time you come to a flooded road, walkway, or path, follow this simple rule: Turn Around Don’t Drown.

Flood Safety Awareness Week continues on Wednesday with Flood Hazards in the North Country.