



# Wet Floodproofing

Wet floodproofing can be defined as permanent or contingent measures applied to a structure and/or its contents that prevent or provide resistance to damage from flooding by allowing floodwater to enter the structure. The basic characteristic that distinguishes wet floodproofing from dry floodproofing is that it allows internal flooding of a structure as opposed to providing essentially watertight protection.



## NOTE

Wet floodproofing is appropriate for basements, garages, and enclosed areas below the flood protection level.

Flooding of a structure's interior is intended to counteract hydrostatic pressure on the walls, floors, and supports of the structure by equalizing interior and exterior water levels during a flood. Inundation also reduces the danger of buoyancy from hydrostatic uplift forces. Such measures may require alteration of a structure's design and construction, use of flood-resistant materials, adjustment of building operations and maintenance procedures, relocation and modification of equipment and contents, and emergency preparedness for actions that require human intervention. This chapter examines:

- protection of the structure;
- design of openings for intentional flooding of enclosed areas below the DFE;
- use of flood-resistant materials;
- adjustment of building operations and maintenance procedures;
- the need for emergency preparedness for actions that require human intervention; and
- design of protection for the structure and its contents, including utility systems and appliances.

**WARNING**

The NFIP allows wet floodproofing only in limited situations. The most common application is with pre-FIRM structures not subject to substantial damage and/or substantial improvement criteria. Structures in the pre-FIRM category can utilize any retrofitting method. However, for new structures or those that have been substantially damaged or are being substantially improved, application of wet floodproofing techniques is limited to the following situations:

Enclosed areas below the BFE that are used solely for building access, parking, or limited storage. These areas must be designed to allow for the automatic entry and exit of floodwater through the use of openings, and be constructed of flood-resistant materials.

Attached garages. A garage attached to a residential structure, constructed with the garage floor slab below the BFE, must be designed to allow for the automatic entry and exit of floodwater. Openings are required in the exterior walls of the garage or in the garage doors. In addition, the areas below the BFE must be constructed with flood-resistant materials.

FEMA has advised communities that variances to allow wet floodproofing may be issued for certain categories of structures. Refer to FEMA's NFIP Technical Bulletin 7-93, Wet Floodproofing Requirements for Structures Located in Special Flood Hazard Areas in Accordance with the National Flood Insurance Program (FEMA, 1993b).

## 5W.1 Protection of the Structure

As with dry floodproofing techniques, developing a wet floodproofing strategy requires site-specific evaluations that may necessitate the services of a design professional. The potential for failure of various structural components (foundations, cavity walls, and solid walls) subjected to inundation is a major cause of structural damage. Some of the reasons a house would need to be wet floodproofed include the following:

- it is a pre-FIRM house located in an area below the BFE;
- it is an historic structure and elevating it is not an option;
- it has an attached garage;
- it is located in an area above the BFE where there is significant flooding potential; or
- it has accessory structures (e.g., detached garage or storage shed).

**NOTE**

FEMA strongly encourages that flood retrofits provide protection to the DFE (or BFE plus 1 foot, whichever is higher). However, in some situations a lower flood-protection level may be appropriate. Homeowners and design professionals should meet with a local building official to discuss the selected retrofit measure and the elevation to which it will protect the home. The text and examples in this manual assume flood protection measures will be implemented to the DFE.

The following is an explanation of various building systems that can be wet floodproofed. Each section explains the typical building materials used to construct them and cautions the user about various methods.

In some locations, the use of ASCE 24 may be required by the building codes. This standard includes minimum requirements for wet floodproofing (Section 6.3), specifically the limitations of use for the space

and design load minimums; it also presents requirements for the utilities located below the minimum elevation requirements. Other sections of the standard discuss flood-resistant materials (Section 5.0) and minimum design elevations below which more stringent design requirements are required (Table 6-1 of ASCE 24).

While wet floodproofing offers an improved level of protection for a structure, extended floodwater inundation of areas subject to flooding could still cause damage to the materials. Additionally the areas above the wet floodproofing are still at risk of damage. This damage could result from higher than expected floodwater, contamination, or toxic materials in close proximity to the house, or growth of mold from extended inundation or higher than normal levels of humidity. There is remaining risk for the areas either wet floodproofed or above the wet floodproofing. This risk is referred to as the residual risk for the structure. While this remaining or residual risk can be financially minimized with the purchase of flood insurance, a homeowner living in a flood-prone area should be aware that some level of risk cannot be eliminated by either physical risk reduction measures like floodproofing or financial risk reduction measures like insurance. The extent of their selected level of protection should be consonant with their ability to absorb the implications of the residual risk. Many design guidance documents and design standards such as ASCE 24 incorporate freeboard, or additional elevation above the BFE, to serve as a risk reduction tool. However, the designer and homeowner should be aware that in some instances floodwater can exceed even freeboard elevations and determine methods of addressing this inherent residual risk.

### 5W.1.1 Foundations

The ability of floodwater to adversely affect the integrity of structure foundations by eroding supporting soil, scouring foundation material, and undermining footings necessitates careful examination of foundation designs and actual construction. Footings should be located deep enough below grade so that flood-related erosion does not reach the top of the footing. In addition, it is vital that the structure be adequately anchored to the foundation. A continuous load path is necessary due to uplift forces during a flood event, which are often great enough to separate an improperly anchored structure from its foundation should floodwater reach such a height. Foundation walls must be checked for lateral support to verify that any lateral forces imposed by floodwater can be resisted. Areas where cripple walls are used should be checked to verify that they are properly braced.

### 5W.1.2 Cavity Walls

Wet floodproofing equalizes hydrostatic pressure throughout the structure by allowing floodwater to enter the structure and equalize internal and external hydrostatic pressure. Thus, any attempt to seal internal air spaces within the wall system is not only technically difficult, but is also contrary to the wet floodproofing approach. Provisions must be made for the cavity space to fill with water and drain at a rate approximately equal to the floodwater rate of rise and fall. Insulation within cavity walls subject to inundation should also be a type that is not subject to damage from floodwater. The design of foundation openings to equalize hydrostatic pressure is covered in Section 5E.1.2.1. Following a flooding event, it may be necessary to remove one side of a cavity wall to allow the interior to properly dry. It is also necessary to verify that drainage or weep holes remain clear of debris. Although not always an indicator of water trapped within a cavity wall system, the presence of efflorescence (white staining) on a wall system may indicate that the wall may not be properly draining and that the cavity does not have sufficient drainage holes. This type of staining may be present in cavity walls and solid walls and indicate the significant transfer of moisture.

### 5W.1.3 Solid Walls

Solid walls are designed without internal spaces that could retain floodwater. Because these walls can be somewhat porous, they can absorb moisture and, to a limited degree, associated contaminants. Such intrusion could cause internal damage, especially in a cold (freeze-thaw) climate. Therefore, where solid walls are constructed of porous material, the retrofitting measures should include both exterior and interior protective cladding to guard against absorption. Some liquid products may be applied to each face of porous wall systems. It is possible for voids or cavities within solid wall systems to be open and not grouted and, therefore, retain additional moisture. These are difficult to grout as a retrofit, but it may be necessary to allow them to drain following a major flooding event.



#### CROSS REFERENCE

Detailed guidance is provided in FEMA's NFIP Technical Bulletin 2-08, *Flood-Resistant Materials Requirements for Buildings Located in Special Flood Hazard Areas in Accordance with the National Flood Insurance Program* (FEMA, 2008a).



#### CROSS REFERENCE

Additional information on these elements can be obtained from FEMA's NFIP Technical Bulletin 7-93, *Wet Floodproofing Requirements for Structures Located in Special Flood Hazard Areas in Accordance with the National Flood Insurance Program* (FEMA, 1993b).

## 5W.2 Use of Flood-Resistant Materials

In accordance with the NFIP, all materials exposed to floodwater must be durable, resistant to flood forces, and retardant to deterioration caused by repeated exposure to floodwater. Interior building elements such as wall finishes, floors, ceilings, roofs, and building envelope openings can also suffer considerable damage from inundation by floodwater, which can lead to failure or an unclean situation. The exterior cladding of a structure subject to flooding should be nonporous, resistant to chemical corrosion or debris deposits, and conducive to easy cleaning. Interior cladding should be easy to clean and not susceptible to damage from inundation. Likewise, floors, ceilings, roofs, fasteners, gaskets, connectors, and building envelope openings should be constructed of flood-resistant materials to minimize damage during and after floodwater inundation.

Generally, these performance requirements indicate that masonry construction is the most suited to wet floodproofing in terms of damage resistance. In some cases, wood or steel structures may be candidates, provided that the wood is pressure treated or naturally decay-resistant and steel is galvanized or protected with rust-retardant paint. A detailed list of appropriate materials can be found in NFIP Technical Bulletin 2-08, *Flood-Resistant Materials Requirements for Buildings Located in Special Flood Hazard Areas in Accordance with the National Flood Insurance Program*. Table 2 of Technical Bulletin 2-08 can be used as a guide for selecting structural (framing and some sheathing) and nonstructural (coverings,



#### WARNING

The use of wall coverings in flood-prone areas needs to be carefully researched. Standard gypsum board is not considered a flood resistant material. Water-resistant gypsum board, commonly referred to as "greenboard," is intended for areas where water may be splashed such as around bathroom sinks; however, it is not considered to be a flood-damage-resistant material. Only products such as cement board or proprietary products designed for submersion in water should be considered for use in areas subject to floodwater.



finishes, insulation, cabinets, doors, partitions, and windows) building components for use below the BFE. Some combinations of acceptable materials may result in unacceptable conditions; always refer to the manufacturer's specifications for more information. In addition to the material selection, Technical Bulletin 2-08 also explains the criteria for selecting connectors and fasteners for below the BFE. It should be noted, however, that the locally enforced building code may include more strict provisions than those stated in Technical Bulletin 2-08.

## **5W.3 Building Operations and Maintenance Procedures and Emergency Preparedness Plans**

The operational procedure aspect of applying floodproofing techniques involves both the structure's functional requirements for daily use and the allocation of space with consideration of each function's potential for flood damage. Daily operations and space use can be organized and modified to minimize damage caused by floodwater.

### **5W.3.1 Flood Warning System**

Because wet floodproofing will, in most cases, require some human intervention when a flood is imminent, it is extremely important that there be adequate time to execute such actions. This may be as simple as monitoring local weather reports, the NWS alarm system, or a local flood warning system.

### **5W.3.2 Inspection and Maintenance Plan**

Every wet floodproofing design requires some degree of periodic inspection and maintenance to ensure that all components will properly operate under flood conditions. Components of the system, including valves and opening covers, should be inspected and operated at least annually.

It is advisable to consider adding more flood openings to ensure they are easily opened and will allow floodwater to enter the building as planned.

Homeowners and designers should consider developing a plan for elevating belongings in storage areas prior to the arrival of floodwater because, over time, contents may increase in this area and it may be difficult to quickly move tightly packed contents.

Some owners have used a line or marking on the wall to illustrate BFEs or historic floods as a reference/reminder of how high off the ground contents that would be damaged by floodwater should be stored.



#### **NOTE**

Utility systems include heating and air conditioning systems, appliances, electrical/plumbing systems, and water service/sewer facilities.

### **5W.3.3 Emergency Operations Plan**

This type of plan is essential when wet floodproofing requires human intervention, such as adjustments to or relocation of contents and utilities. A list of specific actions and the location of necessary materials to perform these actions should be developed.

### 5W.3.4 Protection of Utility Systems

The purpose of the retrofitting methods in this section is to prevent damage to building contents and equipment caused by contact with floodwater by isolating these components from floodwater. Isolation of these components can take the form of relocation, elevation, or protection in place (see Figure 5W-1).

**Figure 5W-1.**  
Elevated air conditioning  
compressor



Local codes may require the use of ASCE 24, which covers utilities in Section 7.0. The standard provides guidance on electrical; plumbing; sanitary sewer; mechanical; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems; and elevators. Depending on the building classification, Table 7.1 of ASCE-24 states minimum elevation requirements for utility and attendant equipment protection. Utilities and attendant equipment below this elevation will require increased loading and design requirements. Some of these requirements state minimum loading requirements, while others state use requirements during and immediately after a design flood event. Although utilities and attendant equipment may be located above the minimum requirements, these requirements also cover wires, pipes, lines, etc., that are located below the minimum elevation.

## 5W.4 Elevation

The most effective method of protection for equipment and contents is to elevate and/or relocate (permanently or temporarily) threatened items out of harm's way. The interior of the structure must be organized in a way that ensures easy access, facilitates relocation, and meets current building code requirements.

Both inside and outside of the flood-prone structure, elevation of key components may be achieved through the use of existing or specially constructed platforms or pedestals. Contingent elevation can be accomplished by the use of hoists or an overhead suspension system. Relocated utilities placed on pedestals are subject to wind and earthquake damage and must be secured to resist wind and seismic forces.

Conversion from a conventional water heater to a tankless water heater is another mitigation opportunity. Although there are conflicting reports on the expected savings to be gained by the conversion, the conversion allows the unit to be moved well above the BFE in many instances. Electrically heated units may have the option of being located inside the house, but liquid propane or natural gas units should be well ventilated and located on the exterior of the house or in a garage or other area. In some instances, energy tax credits may be available to assist in offsetting the higher purchase cost. Either type of unit should always be installed by a licensed plumbing or heating/air contractor.



### CROSS REFERENCE

Refer to FEMA 348, *Protecting Building Utilities from Flood Damage: Principles and Practices for the Design and Construction of Flood Resistant Building Utility Systems* (FEMA, 1999a) for details on the protection of utility systems.

## 5W.5 In-Place Protection

Some types of utilities can be protected in place through a variety of options, such as:

- anchors and tie-downs to prevent flotation;
- low barriers or shields; and
- protective coatings.

The use of flood enclosures to protect utilities (see Figure 5W-2) should be considered an option of last resort and should not be considered a best practice. Floodwater exceeding the predicted height or failure of low barriers or shields can result in loss of the entire unit. This alternative should only be considered if there is no possible way to relocate the unit. Utility systems as used here are mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, including water, sewer, electricity, telephone, CATV, natural gas, etc. The recommendations presented in this section are intended for use individually or in common to mitigate the potential for flood-related damage.



### WARNING

Regardless of the method of protection, any adjustments or modifications to retrofit building utility systems should be completed in accordance with local building code requirements.



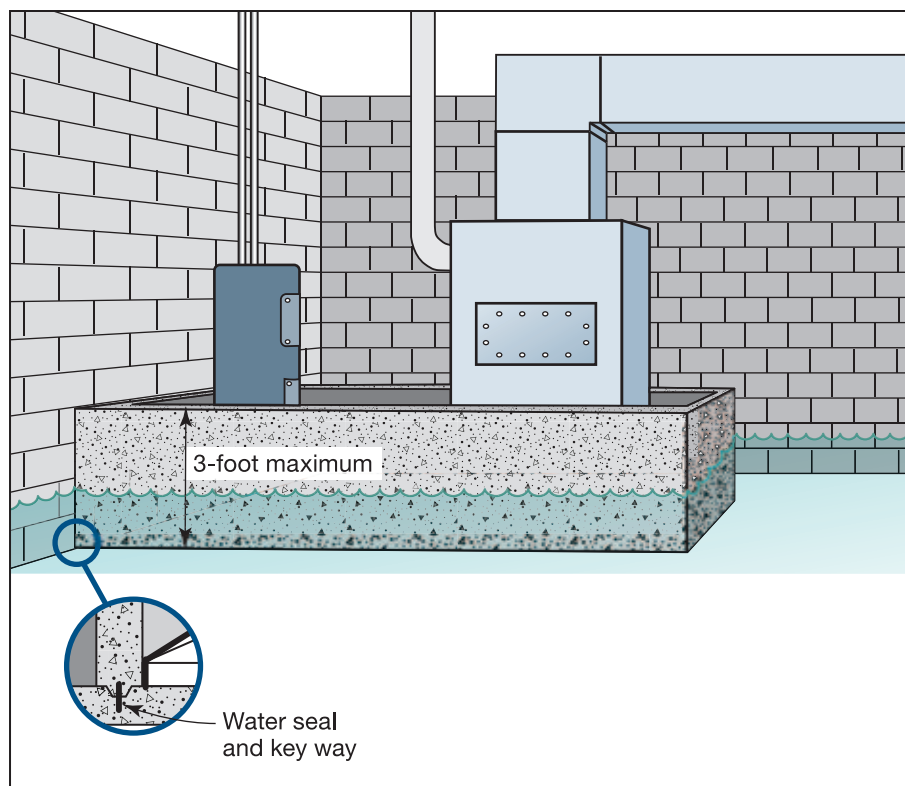
### NOTE

Basic process for protection of utility systems:

- Field Investigation
- Design
- Construction

**Figure 5W-2.**  
**Flood enclosure protects**  
**basement utilities from**  
**shallow flooding**

SOURCE: FEMA 348, 1999A



Developing in-place protection should incorporate design elements into the solution. Walls should be designed with some factor of safety above the floodwater elevation. The wall should be designed to the DFE to incorporate a factor of safety into the protection. The protection measure should be able to resist the hydrostatic loads for the full height of the wall system. Maintenance access to the utility should be carefully considered. It is important to create a passive protection system. Under normal use, the utility should be protected from floodwater and accessible only during times of maintenance. This measure will ensure that the homeowner is not at risk when floodwater rises. Penetrations through the in-place protection should also be sealed to prevent the intrusion of floodwater. Finally the design should consider offset distances from the equipment. Utility systems requiring air flow or air circulation of safety or proper operation should not be enclosed by walls so tightly that it causes improper operation of the unit or causes a safety issue to develop.

## 5W.6 Field Investigation

Detailed information must be obtained about the existing structure to make decisions and calculations concerning the feasibility of using wet floodproofing. Use Figures 5-2 and 5-3 as a guide to record information.

Once this data is collected, the designer should answer the questions contained in Figure 5W-3, to confirm the measure(s) selected and develop a preliminary concept for the installation of wet floodproofing measures.

Once a conceptual approach toward wet floodproofing has been developed, the designer should discuss the following items with the homeowner:

- previous flood history, flood depths, and equipment/systems impacted by the floods;



- plan of action as to what equipment can be relocated and what equipment will have to remain below the DFE;
- length of power outages, water shut-off, or fuel shut-off for work to be completed;
- specific scope of items to be designed; and
- any unsafe practices or code violations or exceptions to current codes.

Flood-Resistant Retrofitting Field Investigation Worksheet	
Owner Name: _____	Prepared By: _____
Address: _____	Date: _____
Property Location: _____	
<p><b>Design Flood Elevation (DFE)</b> _____</p> <p><b>HVAC System</b></p> <p>Can equipment feasibly be relocated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To a pedestal or balcony above the DFE? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>To a higher level on the same floor level? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>To the next floor level? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Is space available for the equipment in the alternate location? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Can existing spaces be modified to accept equipment? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Is additional space needed? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Do local codes restrict such relocations? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Can all equipment be protected in-place? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Is it feasible to install a curb or "pony" wall around equipment to act as a barrier? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Is it feasible to construct a waterproof vault around equipment below the DFE? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Can reasonably sized sump pumps keep water away from the equipment? ____ Yes ____ No</li> </ul> <p><b>Fuel System</b></p> <p>Can equipment feasibly be relocated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To a pedestal or balcony above the DFE? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>To a higher level on the same floor level? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>To the next floor level? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Is space available for the equipment in the alternate location? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Can existing spaces be modified to accept equipment? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Is additional space needed? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Do local codes restrict such relocations? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Can all equipment be protected in-place? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Is the tank properly protected against horizontal and vertical forces from velocity flow and buoyancy? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Is it feasible to install a curb or "pony" wall around equipment to act as a barrier? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Can reasonably sized sump pumps keep water away from the equipment? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Is the meter properly protected against velocity and impact forces? ____ Yes ____ No</li> <li>Do local code officials and the gas company allow the meter to be relocated to a higher location? ____ Yes ____ No</li> </ul>	

Figure 5W-3. Flood-Resistant Retrofitting Field Investigation Worksheet

**Electrical System**

- Is it feasible to relocate the meter base and service lateral above the DFE? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Is it feasible to relocate the main panel and branch circuits above the DFE? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Is it feasible to relocate appliances, receptacles, and circuits above the DFE? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Is it feasible to relocate light switches and receptacles above the DFE? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can ground fault interrupter protection be added to circuits below the DFE? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can service lateral outside penetrations be sealed to prevent water entrance? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can cables and/or conduit be mechanically fastened to prevent damage during flooding? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can splices and connections be made water-resistant or relocated above the DFE? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Do local code officials and electric companies allow the elevation of the meter? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

**Sewage Management System**

- Can the on-site system be protected in-place? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Is it feasible to anchor the tank? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can the distribution box and leech field be protected from scour and impact forces? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can the supply lines be properly protected from scour and impact forces? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can backflow prevention valves be used to minimize flow of sewage into the building? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can equipment feasibly be relocated? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can the system be moved to a higher elevation on the property? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can the tank be relocated to a higher elevation or indoors? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can the drains and toilets be relocated above the DFE? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Is space available for the equipment in the alternate location? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can existing spaces be modified to accept equipment? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Is additional space needed? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Do local codes restrict such relocations? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

**Potable Water System**

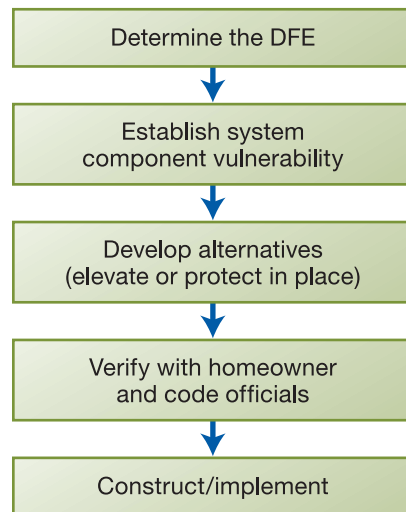
- Can the equipment feasibly be relocated? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can the well be moved to a higher elevation on the property? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can the electric controls for the well be protected from inundation? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can the tank be relocated to a higher elevation or indoors? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can the taps be relocated above the DFE? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Is space available for the equipment in the alternate location? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can existing spaces be modified to accept equipment? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Is additional space needed? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Do local codes restrict such relocations? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can the well be protected in-place? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Is it feasible to install a curb or “pony” wall around equipment to act as a barrier? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Is it feasible to construct a waterproof vault around equipment below the DFE? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can the wellhead and tank be protected from scour and impact forces? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can the supply lines be properly protected from scour and impact forces? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
- Can backflow prevention valves be used to minimize flow of floodwater into the water source? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

**Figure 5W-3. Flood-Resistant Retrofitting Field Investigation Worksheet (concluded)**

## 5W.7 Design Overview

This section presents the process of designing and implementing measures to retrofit existing building utility systems. Retrofitting may involve a combination of elevating and/or protecting in place. The general design process involved with wet floodproofing is shown in Figure 5W-4.

Elevation and protection in place alternatives for electrical systems, HVAC systems, fuel supply/storage systems, water systems, and sewer systems are discussed in Sections 5W.8 through 5W.12.



**Figure 5W-4.**  
Wet floodproofing of  
utilities design process



### CROSS REFERENCE

Retrofitting measures, using techniques similar to those discussed in Section 5W.8, should be considered for telephone and cable TV exterior service lines, indoor wiring, outlet jacks, wall plates, etc.

## 5W.8 Electrical Systems

Electrical system components can be seriously damaged by floodwater when either active or inactive. Silt and grit accumulates in devices not rated for complete submergence and destroys the insulation of the device. Current circuit breakers and fuses are designed to protect the wiring conductors and devices from overload situations, including short circuit or ground fault conditions. Floodwater seriously affects operation of these devices.

Most houses were not designed to mitigate potential flood damage to electrical equipment; however, there are retrofitting steps that will provide permanent protection for the electrical system.

- The most important step is to raise or relocate equipment and devices above the DFE.
- A second step is to seal electrical equipment penetrations on outside walls, anchor cables and raceway, and mechanically protect the wiring system in flood-prone locations.
- A third step is to seal out moisture. Electrical system problems occur as moisture permeates devices and causes corrosion.

- A fourth step necessary for retrofitting is the addition of Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) breakers, which deactivate circuits when excessive current leakage is encountered. This step ultimately assists life safety protection and may be required by local codes.
- If it is possible, mount main service lines and the meter to the downstream side of the structure to limit the exposure to debris impact. If service from the distribution lines are underground, it is important to verify that they are buried to a sufficient depth to eliminate them being uncovered by erosion or scour. If possible, mount the meter to above the DFE and sufficiently secure it and the service lines below the DFE to resist flood loads.

Each residence presents the designer with a unique set of characteristics, including age, method of construction, size, and location. There are different combinations of systems that may need to be modified. When it is not feasible to elevate in place, the following information provides the design considerations and details that govern the retrofitting of electrical equipment and circuits below the DFE:

- receptacles and switches should be kept to a minimum and elevated as high as is practical;
- circuit conductors must be Underwriters Laboratories (UL) listed for use in wet locations;
- wiring should be run vertically for drainage after being inundated;
- new wiring should be underground feeder (UF) grade wiring to eliminate the need to replace large portions of wiring behind walls following flooding;
- receptacles and switches should be installed in non-corrosive boxes with holes punched in the bottom to facilitate drying. The receptacles will have to be replaced after inundation by floodwater;
- lighting fixtures should be connected via simple screw base porcelain lampholders to allow speedy removal of lamps or fixtures, and the lampholders can be cleaned and reused;
- sump pumps and generators should have cables long enough to reach grounded receptacles above the DFE;
- all circuits below the DFE should be protected by GFCI breakers;
- circuits serving equipment below the DFE should be placed on separate GFCIs, clearly marked in the breaker box. This allows power to be turned off to circuits below the DFE without affecting the rest of the home; and
- wiring splices below DFE should be kept to a minimum. If conductors must be spliced, use crimp connectors and waterproof with heat shrink tubing or grease packs over the splice.



#### CROSS REFERENCE

Additional information on these elements can be obtained from FEMA's NFIP Technical Bulletin 7-93, *Wet Floodproofing Requirements for Structures Located in Special Flood Hazard Areas in Accordance with the National Flood Insurance Program* (FEMA, 1993b).



## 5W.9 Heating, Ventilating, and Air Conditioning Systems

HVAC system equipment (i.e., furnaces, boilers, compressors) should be elevated/relocated above the DFE or protected within a watertight enclosure whenever possible. However, the protection of HVAC system equipment requires consideration of several factors. Some points to consider when evaluating potential retrofitting measures are:

- adequate space and structural support for relocated equipment;
- maintenance of required equipment clearances and maintenance access dictated by code and/or manufacturer;
- provision of adequate combustion air for fuel-burning equipment;
- modification and/or maintenance of proper venting of fuel-burning equipment;
- necessity of non-combustible construction materials;
- necessity of eliminating ductwork below the DFE whenever possible;
- suitability of protective partitions or vaults;
- reconfiguration of ductwork;
- consideration of duct construction material; and
- modification of hot water or steam circulation piping.



### NOTE

In a post-flooding situation, the designer may recommend replacing old equipment with a new one that meets current codes, is more energy/cost-efficient, and fits in the desired location. In some cases, the old equipment may be replaced with lateral or in-line equipment, installed in the attic to protect it from flooding.

## 5W.10 Fuel Supply/Storage Systems

In conjunction with the retrofitting of HVAC equipment, the designer must consider rerouting and/or extending fuel supply lines (i.e., fuel oil, natural gas, and propane gas) when equipment is relocated. Floodwater can pull poorly anchored tanks off their foundations (see Figure 5W-5) and result in damages and the potential spill of toxic liquids. In order to prevent damaged fuel supply or storage tanks, the following should be considered with respect to fuel supply/storage systems:

- extension of fuel supply lines to relocated equipment;
- use of flexible connections;
- adequate support and anchorage to resist hydrostatic and hydrodynamic forces that act on tanks. This can be accomplished by:
  - elevating tanks on structural fill;
  - elevating tanks on a braced platform;



### NOTE

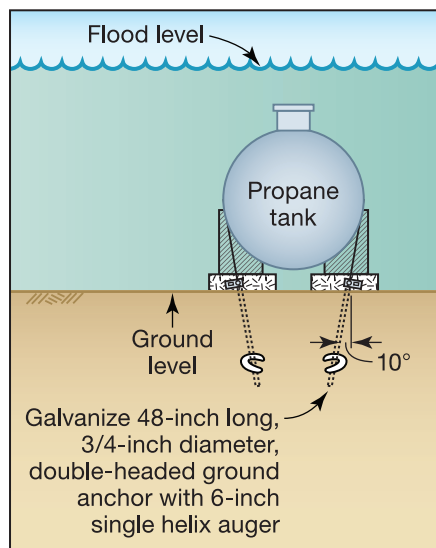
Galvanized steel ductwork is less susceptible than ductboard or similar materials to damage from flooding. Generally, if flooded, ducts made of ductboard are not reusable.

- anchoring tanks to properly install and using designed ground anchors (Figure 5W-6);
- anchoring supply lines to the downstream side of structural members;
- relocating fuel tank because of equipment relocation; and
- using automatic cut-off valves.

**Figure 5W-5.**  
An improperly anchored  
tank; tethered only by a  
supply line



**Figure 5W-6.**  
Fuel tank anchored from  
two sides



## 5W.11 Water Systems

The primary threats that floodwater poses to water systems are contamination and velocity flow damage. Contamination by floodwater may occur through infiltration into on-site water wells, public water supplies, open faucets, or broken pipes. In flood-prone areas that experience high velocity flow, damage may occur from the effects of the velocity, wave action, and/or debris impact. Some factors to consider when retrofitting water systems include:

- minimization of plumbing fixtures below the DFE;
- allowance of adequate space for elevating components;
- modification of lines and fixtures to prevent backflow;
- protection of system components from high velocity flow;
- suitability of protective partitions or vaults; and
- modification of the well top using watertight casing.



### NOTE

Adequate protection of all fuel, water, sewer pipes, and tanks from damage caused by erosion, scour, buoyancy, debris impact, velocity flow, and wave action should be verified during the retrofitting design process.

## 5W.12 Sewer Systems

The main dangers associated with the flooding of sewer systems are backup of sewage, damage of system components, and contamination of floodwater. Because these dangers could result in serious health risks, preventive measures could help clean-up expenses and hazards. Retrofitting sewer systems to eliminate or minimize the dangers include the following possible options:

- relocation of collection components to a higher elevation;
- installation and/or maintenance of a check or sewer backflow prevention valve;
- installation and/or maintenance of combination check and gate valves (see Figure 5W-7);
- installation of an effluent ejector pump;
- provision of a backup electrical source;
- sealing of septic tank to prevent contamination; and
- adequate anchorage of septic tank to withstand buoyancy forces.



### NOTE

Guidance concerning the anchoring of septic tanks is applicable to other types of underground storage tanks.

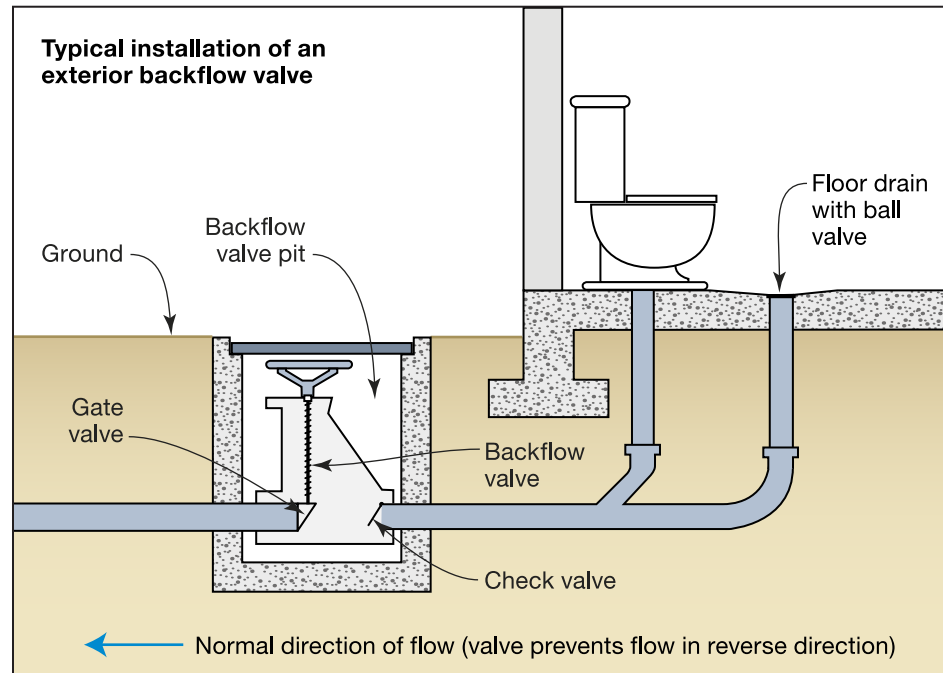


### WARNING

When subject to flood forces, ruptured storage tanks containing natural gas, oil, or propane also pose the additional risk of explosion or environmental contamination.

It is important that sanitary sewage storage systems in flood-prone areas are able to prevent contamination during and immediately following a flooding event. In areas where ASCE 24 is enforced, Section 7.3.4 specifically outlines sizing requirements for sealed storage tanks during and after flood

events while the soil is saturated. The guidelines are intended to prevent contamination of the floodwater. Even if ASCE 24 is not a required design standard, it is an appropriate guidance document for sealed sanitary storage tank sizing requirements.



**Figure 5W-7.**  
Backflow valve – a check valve and gate valve with an effluent pump bypass  
SOURCE: FEMA 348, 1999A

## 5W.13 Calculation of Buoyancy Forces

The anchorage of any tank system consists of attaching the tank to a resisting body with enough weight to hold the tank in place. The attachment, or anchors, must be able to resist the total buoyant force acting on the tank. The buoyant force on an empty tank is the volume of the tank multiplied by the specific weight of water. It is usually advisable to include a safety factor of 1.3, as is shown in the net buoyancy force computation in Equation 5W-1.



### NOTE

To minimize buoyancy forces, fuel tanks should be "topped off" prior to flooding.



### CROSS REFERENCE

For a more detailed analysis of buoyancy forces, refer to FEMA 348, *Protecting Building Utilities from Flood Damage: Principles and Practices for the Design and Construction of Flood Resistant Building Utility Systems* (FEMA, 1999a)



**EQUATION 5W-1: NET BUOYANCY FORCE ON A TANK**

$$F_b = [0.134V_t\gamma_w FS] - W_t \quad (\text{Eq. 5W-1})$$

where:

$F_b$  = net buoyancy force of the tank (lb)

$V_t$  = volume of the tank (gal)

0.134 = factor to convert gal to ft<sup>3</sup>

$\gamma_w$  = specific weight of flood water surrounding the tank (generally 62.4 lb/ft<sup>3</sup> for fresh water and 64.0 lb/ft<sup>3</sup> for saltwater)

$FS$  = factor of safety to be applied to the computation, typically 1.3 for tanks

$W_t$  = weight of the tank, calculated using an empty tank weight (lb)

The volume of concrete required to offset the buoyant force of the tank can be computed as shown in Equation 5W-2.

**EQUATION 5W-2: CONCRETE VOLUME REQUIRED TO OFFSET BUOYANCY**

$$V_c = \frac{F_b}{(S_c - \gamma_w)} \quad (\text{Eq. 5W-2})$$

where:

$V_c$  = volume of concrete required (ft<sup>3</sup>)

$F_b$  = net buoyancy force of the tank (lb)

$S_c$  = effective weight of concrete (typically 150 lb/ft<sup>3</sup>)

$\gamma_w$  = specific weight of water (62.4 lb/ft<sup>3</sup> for fresh water or 64.0 lb/ft<sup>3</sup> for salt water)

To resist this buoyant force, a slab of concrete with a volume,  $V_c$ , is usually strapped to the tank to resist the buoyant load.

Sample calculations for the net buoyancy force on the tank and concrete volume required to resist buoyancy are available in Appendix C.

## 5W.14 Construction/Implementation

The retrofitting of utility systems, both elevating and protecting in place, must conform to the requirements set forth in local and state building codes, standards, floodplain ordinances, and equipment manufacturer's installation instructions. Building codes may include reference codes and standards. These reference codes typically address electrical, plumbing, and other utility items of work. It is important to verify compliance with each of these reference codes during the design phase and into the construction phase. For material or equipment substitutions, the technical bulletins, FEMA publications, and ASCE 24 referenced in this chapter should be consulted. All applicable permits and inspections should be completed prior to beginning the next phase of the construction.

The successful construction and implementation of wet floodproofing measures should include the use of flood-resistant materials and consider operations and preparedness planning in Section 5W.3.