



The Montana Department of
**Natural Resources
& Conservation**



**Montana Disaster
& Emergency Services**

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Montana Experiences Sub-Zero Temperatures: Potential for Ice Jam Flooding

HELENA, Mont. – Despite the dry, warm start to winter, Montana is now experiencing a prolonged period of sub-zero temperatures and arctic cold fronts. Montana Division of Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) warn that this abrupt shift serves as a timely reminder that weather patterns can change unexpectedly, necessitating vigilance and awareness of potential ice jam flooding.

“Ice jams can cause dangerous conditions for those living adjacent to waterbodies. When the water has nowhere to go, it can cause flooding with little or no warning,” said DNRC’s Montana National Flood Insurance Program Coordinator Traci Sears. “Watch for rapidly changing conditions throughout the winter season.”

Ice jam flooding is prevalent along Montana's rivers and streams from now through March. Ice jams, or ice dams, happen when chunks of ice clump together to block the flow of a river or stream. Ice jams are caused by melting snow and ice, typically after a sequence of sub-zero temperatures followed by a rapid warm-up. As melting ice starts to move, it can become lodged at bridges, bends, or narrower reaches impacting stream flow that can result in flooding.

In addition to threatening homes and private property, rising waters can impact [fishing access](#) sites, roads, and hiking trails, prompting closures. Residents living near rivers or streams are encouraged to develop a flood evacuation plan and consider the following precautions:

- Assess your flood risk and purchase flood insurance if you live in a flood plain or low-lying area. Most policies have a 30-day waiting period before going into effect.

- Ensure you have an adequate supply of drinking water on hand as flooding may compromise local water systems.
- Clear snow from around your home and structures to divert water from snow melt away from your foundation.
- Build a [Disaster Supply Kit](#) and keep it in an easily accessible place.
- Never venture onto a frozen river or ice jam, as thermal currents in rivers are unpredictable, and ice stability can change rapidly, leading to injury or drowning.

Montana DES Response Bureau Chief, Brett Lloyd advises residents to, “Sign up for local alerts, listen to local officials, and evacuate early if you are in a high-risk area.”

To learn more about the Montana Floodplain Program visit: [Floodplains](#)

Additional flood insurance information is available from the Montana Commissioner of Securities and Insurance Office Flood Insurance at <https://csimt.gov/your-insurance/flood/>.

For up-to-date information on stream flows and potential flood conditions, visit the Montana All-Hazards Weather Monitor website at https://www.weather.gov/byz/montana_statewide_information .

For additional information on stream restrictions and closures, visit [Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks](#).

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About DNRC: The DNRC’s mission is to help ensure that Montana’s land and water resources provide benefits for present and future generations. For more information visit dnrc.mt.gov.

About DES: Montana Disaster & Emergency Services (MT DES) is the lead agency coordinating comprehensive emergency management in Montana. In collaboration with local and tribal governments we build, sustain, and improve our ability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate hazards.