

SUSQUEHANNA RIVER BASIN COMMISSION
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**MARCH 21-25 MARKS
NATIONAL FLOOD SAFETY AWARENESS WEEK**
Susquehanna River Flood Forecast & Warning System Highlighted

HARRISBURG, Pa. – The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) and NOAA’s National Weather Service (NWS) today marked the start of National Flood Safety Awareness Week, March 21-25. This 5-day designation was issued by NWS to coincide with the beginning of spring, which is the time of the year when the threat of flooding is generally the greatest – although flooding can occur any time of the year in the Susquehanna River Basin.

Much of the focus of this awareness campaign is internet-driven (<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/floodsafety>), allowing people to access a wide-range of information related to flooding and flood safety programs, including safety tips, and information on flood insurance programs and how to flood proof homes. During each day of the week, a different program will be featured such as the NWS’ Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Services and Turn Around Don’t Drown™ programs.

“No matter how much information there is on the dangers of flooding, it has limited value if people don’t know it exists,” said SRBC Executive Director Paul Swartz. “Making people aware of the existing resources and where they can access it is an important step in the overall effort to help people understand the dangers posed by flooding.”

According to the NWS, more people die each year in the U.S. from flooding than any other severe-weather event, and more than half of those deaths are the result of people attempting to drive on flooded roadways and are swept away.

Dave Ondrejik, Warning Coordination Meteorologist, NWS State College, said, “People often have a false sense of security in vehicles. But even the largest passenger vehicles are no match against raging floodwaters. That’s why it is important that people living in flood-prone areas be alert to flood warnings and have evacuation routes planned out in advance.”

More than 80 percent of the 1,400 plus municipalities in the Susquehanna basin include areas that are flood-prone. Since 1986, the Susquehanna Flood Forecasting and Warning System has provided the data used by the NWS to issue accurate and timely flood watches and warnings. The Susquehanna System is extremely cost-effective, with a benefit-cost ratio of 20-to-1. For every federal dollar invested in the Susquehanna System, \$20 are saved through reduced damages and reduced federal flood recovery payouts.

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Swartz said, “Despite the fiscal and life-saving benefits, the federal funding needed to keep the Susquehanna System operational is once again in jeopardy. And knowing that the Susquehanna basin is among the most flood-prone areas in the nation, makes the call for restored funding all the more urgent.”

The Susquehanna System, which is credited with reducing flood damages in the Susquehanna basin by an average of \$32 million each year, performed extremely well during Tropical Storm Ivan in September 2004. Using data generated by the Susquehanna System, the NWS was able to issue near-perfect flood predictions and warnings – giving businesses and residents time to secure their property and get themselves out of harm’s way before the flood waters struck.

“Many community and emergency management officials who rely on the accuracy of the Susquehanna System were very impressed by the near-perfect performance during Tropical Storm Ivan,” said Swartz. “We can’t control or prevent the times when Mother Nature wreaks havoc on us, but we can take preventative measures to ensure our safety. It is vital that federal funding for the Susquehanna Flood Forecast and Warning System be restored.”

SRBC is supporting a \$2 million appropriation request for federal fiscal year 06. These funds, if restored, would be allocated to the NWS and the U.S. Geological Survey to maintain and operate the Susquehanna System.

SRBC is the governing agency established under a 100-year compact signed on December 24, 1970 by the federal government and the states of New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland to protect and wisely manage the water resources of the Susquehanna River Basin. The Susquehanna River starts in Cooperstown, N.Y., and flows 444 miles to Havre de Grace, Md., where the river meets the Chesapeake Bay.

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