DO YOU KNOW YOUR POTENTIAL TO BE FLOODED?

■ FLOOD HAZARD

The City of Pooler has areas that have a history of flooding in the streets, yards and on some occasions, water has reached levels entering garages and buildings. The City of Pooler has areas that have a history of flooding in the streets, yards and on some occasions, water has reached levels entering garages and buildings. In most cases, as soon as tides change and pressure is relieved from the canal system, the flood waters in these areas subside. It should be noted that some areas in Pooler do experience some flooding even though they are not in the designated Special Flood Hazard Area. NOAA predictions are that this hurricane season, which runs from the 1st of June to the 30th of November, there will be 12 named storms. Out of these, six (6) may reach hurricane status and two (2) are projected to be major hurricanes of Category 3 strength or higher. We need to be prepared because hurricanes are unpredictable. Located 30 miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean, our City would experience some flooding from a Class 3 storm surge and severe flooding from a Class 5 storm surge.

■ FLOOD SAFETY

Hurricane Season is here! Be prepared and take the following precautions:

1. Know the flood warning procedures,
2. Prior to evacuating your residence, turn off electricity, gas and water in your home,
3. During times of heavy rainfall, monitor the level of water in the drainage way and stay tuned to radio or TV for possible flood warning,
4. Evacuate the flood hazard area in times of impending flood or when advised to do so by the police chief or fire chief,
5. Do not walk through flowing water; as little as six (6) inches of moving water can knock you off your feet,
6. If your car stalls in high water, abandon it immediately and seek higher ground. More people drown in their cars than anywhere else,
7. Keep children away from flood waters, ditches, culverts, unstable stream banks and storm drains, and
8. Be especially cautious at night.

■ PROPERTY PROTECTION

Many buildings can be protected against flooding by retrofitting. Retrofitting is changing an existing structure in some manner to help reduce flooding. Some retrofitting techniques are waterproofing walls and doors, adding waterproof fences (usually brick or concrete) with sealing gates and even elevating the building above flood levels. Emergency measures you can take during a flood which will help reduce property damage include:

1. Place furniture on beds, then personal items on top of the furniture. Anchor, secure or weigh down items which may float or move,
2. Move cardboard and newspapers to high ground. Otherwise, they may disintegrate and/or clog drains when the flood waters recede,
3. Put chemicals (insecticides, weed killers, those that give off heat, explosive or toxic gases when exposed to water) in waterproof containers and remove to high areas of the building, and
4. Avoid backflow of sewer lines by closing off all sewer line entries into the house. If this is a somewhat regular occurrence during heavy rains, you may consider installing a backflow prevention valve on your sewer line. If you have a backflow prevention valve, be sure it is properly maintained. Disconnect the plugs of heavy, unmovable appliances. All appliances must be disconnected prior to re-establishing electrical service. Getting around debris or wreckage to get to electrical outlets after a flood may be difficult and perhaps dangerous.

Free publications on how to protect your property can be obtained from Pooler City Hall located at 100 SW Hwy. 80. Additional information can be found on the City of Pooler's website at www.Pooler-ga.us and FEMA's website at www.fema.gov

■ PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

All development in the floodplain (not just construction of buildings) needs local permits. Always check with the Building/Inspections Department before you build on, do substantial improvement, alter, grade or place fill on your property. A permit is needed to insure that these types of projects do not cause problems on other properties. If you see building or any type of development without a "permit sign" posted, contact our Building/Inspections Department at 748-6652.

■ SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENT REQUIREMNTS

The ordinance also requires that all substantial improvements to a building be treated as a new building. That is the structure must be elevated 1' above the base flood elevation. A substantial improvement is when the value of an addition, alteration, repair or reconstruction project equals to or exceeds 50% of the value of the existing building. Substantially damaged buildings must also be brought up to the same standards. More information on the substantial improvement and substantial damage rules can be found in *Answers to Questions about Substantially Damaged Buildings.* Copies are available at the West Chatham Library and the Building/Inspections Department at City Hall.

■ DRAINAGE SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

Drainage maintenance programs for the City of Pooler include the inspection of the drainage ways and the removal of debris. Unless a drainage way is on City property or the City has accepted a drainage easement on private property, individual property owners are responsible for maintaining the drainage systems on their property as well as the free flow of water within the area of the 100-year floodplain. They should regularly check for and remove debris or obstructions. The City of Pooler has regulations against dumping in channels and violators should be reported to the Public Works Department at 748-4800.

■ NATURAL AND BENEFICIAL FUNCTIONS

The City of Pooler is a beautiful place in which to live, and the areas within or near our floodplains are important assets. Pooler has a lot of wetlands that provide a wide range of benefits in the human and natural systems. These benefits range from reducing the number and severity of floods by helping handle storm water runoff, and minimizing non-point water pollution. For example, by allowing floodwater to slow down, sediments settle out, thus maintaining water quality. These areas are being protected by local ordinances, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and conservation easements. We should all do our part to help keep our floodplain and floodplain waters free of contaminants such as oil, paint, anti-freeze, and pesticides. Floodplains provide green space and open space to be enjoyed by the citizens of Pooler as well as future generations. **Please help to preserve these areas.**

■ FLOOD WARNING

In Chatham County, the Chatham Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) manages the flood warning system. Once CEMA receives a potential dangerous warning, sirens will be activated. The sirens can give as little as fifteen minutes warning time and is tested the 1st Wednesday of every month at noon. When you hear the sirens, information can be heard on the television (WTOC, WSAV, or WJCL) or on the radio at WCHY (94.1) on what to do. Information can be heard on the NOAA weather radio broadcast at frequency 162.40 and flood conditions can also be monitored by visiting the *USGS River Gage Website*. Local evacuation routes can be found in the phone book. Residents are urged to go first to the safe homes of family and friends, then to hotels and motels in safe areas and to public shelters only as a last resort. For additional information contact CEMA at 201-4500 or visit the website at www.chathamemergency.org

■ FLOOD INSURANCE

Your homeowners insurance **will not** cover losses due to flooding. The City of Pooler participates in the National Flood Insurance Program which makes flood insurance available to everyone in the City. Because of our participation in the CRS (Community Rating System) Program, the City of Pooler has earned a Class 6 rating. This means that the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) policies issued or renewed for properties in the Special Flood Hazard will receive a 20% premium discount. A new insurance policy, Increase Cost of Compliance (ICC), is now available that assists in bringing a non-compliant structure up to the NFIP standards if the building is substantially damaged or repetitively flooded. For many people, their home and its contents represent their greatest investment. We strongly urge you to buy flood insurance and contents coverage to protect yourself from devastating losses due to flooding. With the type of flooding we experience in the City of Pooler, there is usually more damage to the furniture and contents than there is to the structure. You do not have to live in the flood plain to qualify for flood insurance. Property owners can insure their buildings and contents and renters can insure their possessions. **There is a *30-day* waiting period before coverage takes effect.** Therefore, it is essential to plan ahead.

■ CITY OF POOLER FLOOD PRONE AREAS

As a public service, the City of Pooler will provide you with information regarding whether your property is located in a flood hazard area. Copies of FEMA Elevation Certificates on all buildings constructed in the floodplain since 1990 are available upon request. Flood information and detailed maps showing the 100-year floodplain area can also be viewed at www.sagis.org, the West Chatham Public Library and in our Planning & Zoning Department located at 100 SW Highway 80.