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Household flood plans in Scotland

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Why this research is important

Flooding in Scotland is happening more often and is getting worse. This is mainly due to climate change. However, many people do not realise they are at risk, and few have taken steps to protect their homes. Everyone should check their flood risk and, if they are at risk, take steps to protect themselves and their homes. This project produced a simple flood plan that can help people stay safe and know what to do in an emergency.

What this project was about

This project had two main goals: 1) to create a simple household flood plan that people can use to prepare for flooding; and 2) to find ways to encourage people to use this plan. The plan was designed with help from the public and experts to make it clear, useful and accessible.

How the research was done

The plan was designed by a research team from three research institutions with the help of 81 people across Scotland. The research team also looked at almost 70 existing emergency plans and reviewed the latest research on how people behave when preparing for flooding. This helped make sure the plan is easy to use and based on evidence.

What we learned about people and flooding

Many people do not realise they are at risk of flooding. If people do not know they are at risk, they are less

likely to prepare for flooding. However, if people see other people preparing for flooding, they are more likely to prepare. During a flood, communities often come together and help each other. This is important as some people may find it harder to prepare or respond than others. Preparing for flooding needs communities to come together to make sure everyone is ready.

What makes a good household flood plan

This research found evidence that household flood plans work best when 1) they are relevant to people completing them and they can make them personal; 2) they have easy actions for people to do right now and when a flood is expected; 3) they have clear guidance, including links to organisations that can help; 4) they encourage people to talk to neighbours and share advice.

Encouraging people to complete the plan

Simply completing a household flood plan can help people know what to do in a flood. People are more likely to complete a flood plan when encouraged by people and organisations they trust. They are less likely to act in response to big public flood awareness campaigns alone. Some groups need extra support like social housing tenants, older people, and persons with disabilities or health conditions. Completing a plan reduces strain on the emergency services by helping people make sure they are safe.

Main recommendations

Make the plan easy to access

The plan should be printed on paper as not everyone has internet access. People who might struggle to complete it should be supported. An accessible online version will also help more people use the plan. It should also be made available in different languages.

Increase uptake

The plan should be promoted by trusted organisations and community groups. They could use local events and networks to introduce it. People should be encouraged to connect with local flood groups. Other sectors, like insurance providers, could also help spread awareness.

Focus on the most at risk groups

People living in social housing accommodation should receive the plan as soon as possible. They face hidden costs from the impacts of flooding which could push them into poverty. People who may struggle to prepare, such as older adults with long-term health issues and persons with disabilities, should also be prioritised. They should be supported to complete a plan as soon as possible as it can help keep them safe. Everyone should also be encouraged to review the plan regularly.

Checking the plan reaches those who need it

It is important to check whether the plan is reaching the people who need it most. By keeping track of how many plans are given out, who gets them, and where those people live, we can see if the plan is reaching people in areas at risk of flooding.

Making sure the plan works

People from communities across Scotland who were involved in designing the household flood plan say that they like it. As more people start using the plan, it is important to make sure the plan works for everyone. To do this, a follow-up research project should evaluate how well the plan is working for people over time. It could also check if the plan helps reduce the impacts on people, including those groups most at risk, after flood events happen. The research project could also review the ways the plan is sent out to people to evaluate which approach is most effective.

Conclusion

Flooding is becoming a bigger risk in Scotland. However, public preparedness is low. This project presents evidence that a simple, well-designed household flood plan can help people take action. By focusing on social connections, clear messaging, and support for vulnerable groups, more households can be encouraged to prepare for flooding and reduce its impact.

Please reference this project summary as follows: F. Henderson, R. Thomas, T. Craig, B. Bennett, A. Hague, R. Hawkins, A. McAllister and R. Dooley-Neal. (2026). *Household flood plans in Scotland: Applying behavioural learnings to inform best practice and uptake*. Project Summary. CRW2025_01. Centre of Expertise for Waters (CREW).

To access the outputs for this project, please visit: www.crew.ac.uk/publications/household-flood-plan

For further information on the related CREW project, 'Reducing the mental health and wellbeing impacts of flooding', please refer to the publication page: <https://www.crew.ac.uk/publications/reducing-mental-health-and-wellbeing-impacts-of-flooding>

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