



- RECORD BREAKING JUNE FLOOD FOR SUSQUEHANNA -

BACKGROUND

The June floods of 2006 in the Twin Tiers, the worst in decades, have disrupted the landscape, business and the resident's way of life. The flood zone and surrounding areas were negatively affected both economically and culturally. These events continue to be a large concern for everyone who lives or does business in the areas surrounding the Susquehanna River.

What can you do when your home or business is under water? Floods force residents in the community to their knees for help. These are people we know and care for. This is why the community needs to be educated and informed about these types of disasters, as they are frequent in this flood prone area.

THE FLOODING OF JUNE 2006

Historically, June and July for the Twin Tiers is typically humid and hot and experiences an average of 3.6 inches of rain each month.¹ However, this was not the case in June 2006 at the Pennsylvania and New York border along the Susquehanna River. The area received around 7 inches of rain in just four days.² A slow moving weather system pulled water from the Atlantic Ocean and released it on Northeastern United States.³ The area, already prone to such events, experienced some of the worst flooding in decades.

Sections of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and West Virginia were declared disaster areas. This allowed directly affected residents to apply for government aid. Seven counties in the Twin Tiers were heavily affected including: Broome, Delaware, Tioga, Otsego, Chenango, Bradford and Susquehanna. Major losses from the flood include deaths and property destruction. In New York State four people died, three of which were vehicle-related deaths. In Broome County flooding destroyed 800 homes and severely damaged 300 others.⁴ Governor Pataki estimated property damages for areas affected in New York to be in the \$100 million range.⁵

Damage to the infrastructure was substantial in areas. Sections of the local thruway were closed for four days because of severe damage. Some sections of the thruway were washed out entirely and are blamed as the cause of two deaths in New York State. The Erie Canal shut down 286 miles of the 524-mile long canal system for an extended period of time.⁶ The Gilboa Dam, part of New York City's water supply, had water levels reach 8-inches below the top of the dam.⁷



Governor Pataki activated some 300 National Guard members to help in rescue efforts.⁸ New York City deployed 100 fire fighters, police, and environmental departments to assist in disaster management.⁹ Coast Guard helicopters were dispatched to rescue 70 people in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania.¹⁰ This aid was vital to securing many residents and plays a primary role in disaster management.

The reality of this disaster is that many people and business owners lost their livelihood. With nowhere to live or no business to operate the future outlook of these residents is bleak. For the community this is an opportunity to step up and support these people. This is the time were residents will find a strong sense of community.

THE CURRENT STATE OF THINGS

Currently, clean up efforts continue and community fundraisers continue to raise awareness and the necessary funds. Government aid, including \$35 million from New York State¹¹ and \$16.2 million from FEMA¹², has helped significantly in supporting the reconstruction. The various areas directly affected still require repair and clean up. In areas like Conklin, New York, we can see houses condemned with orange neon letters spray painted on the discolored siding waiting to be torn down. Clean up efforts will take a considerable amount of time. Compared to the disaster in New Orleans we can see that clean up is a long and difficult path. This is reason enough to develop a working model for prevention, preparation and reconstruction.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Looking forward, we can see that events like this will happen again. The Susquehanna River has flooded repeatedly on average about every 20 years.¹³ The future holds the opportunity to make a better situations from the current one. The first steps need to be taken in remapping the flood zones and assessing the current damages.

There are many opportunities for the community to offer their support. The United Way of Broome County sponsors the “Day of Caring” in September, which invites residents to volunteer their time towards projects that are designed to help flood victims.¹⁴ United Way also sponsors a fundraiser for victims. Communities in susceptible areas need to be aware of flood dangers. These residents need to know how to handle a flood and how to recover if they suffer loses.

OUR STANCE AS A COMMUNITY



Position statement: For our neighbors and relatives affected by flooding, the need to work together for everyone's benefit is a must.

Mission statement: It is our duty as a community to get involved and become educated on these events.

With lessons from historical floods, our local culture is able to construct a knowledge base for aid and relief in the event of these types of disasters. Constructing a comprehensive plan for preparation and revival is no small task. All affected residents should be active in creating this plan to ensure its full effectiveness.

The events leading up to the inevitable floods in the future will test our community's ability to handle these situations. We can only predict, at most, a few days in advance when severe weather conditions threaten the community. This luxury is not always available and requires residents, officials and recovery teams to know exactly what needs to be done in the event of flooding. Community support is the key component in this operation and must be realized by those able to support it.

End Notes

1. Department of Metrology, University of Utah. (2006). *National – average monthly precipitation*. Retrieved December 19, 2006, from <http://www.met.utah.edu/jhorel/html/wx/climate/normrain.html>
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3. New York State Department of Labor. (2006, July 4). 800 homes destroyed in one upstate county. *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. State and regional.
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5. FEMAa. (2006, July 19). *SBA disaster loans surpass \$1.7 million*. Retrieved December 14, 2006, from <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=28018> FEMA b. (2006, July 20). *\$16.2 million approved for disaster aid*. Retrieved December 14, 2006, from <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=28025>
6. New York State Department of Labor. (2006, July 4). 800 homes destroyed in one upstate county. *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. State and regional.
7. Kates, William. (2006, June 29). Major flooding causes three deaths, prompt states of emergency. *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. State and regional.
8. Ibid.



9. Weber, Lauren. (2006, June 30). Hope amid anguish; Residents of upstate areas flooded by Susquehanna River look to future as they deal with the now. *Newsday (New York)*. pp. A08.
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12. Kates, William. (2006, June 29). Major flooding causes three deaths, prompt states of emergency. *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. State and regional.
13. Susquehanna River Basin Commission. (2007). <http://www.srbc.net/index.htm>
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