Flood Risk Disclosure

Local Best Practices for Disclosing Flood Risk During Real Estate Transactions

September 2, 2022

FEMA

Table of Contents

1. Disclosing Flood Risk Helps Protect Life and Property

Floods are costly to homeowners – an inch of flooding can cost up to $25,000.[1] For an uninsured homeowner, a flood can be devastating. Knowing the risk of flooding is the first step to adequately protecting lives and property. Disclosing flood risk information during real estate transactions is a timely and effective way to help homeowners make better, risk-informed investment decisions.

For many, purchasing a home is the largest investment they will make in their lifetime. During the homebuying process, prospective buyers look to a network of trusted sources to help them make decisions, including the local government and real estate professionals. Local officials and real estate professionals play a critical role in helping homeowners avoid future losses due to flood risks and hazards.

Hundreds of communities, many of which participate in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Community Rating System (CRS), have developed local programs to inform prospective homebuyers of the flood risk and mitigation options for properties they are considering. This guide spotlights a variety of these communities – rural to urban, coastal to inland – with established local programs for flood risk awareness and disclosure.

1.1. Intended Audience

This guide is intended for use by community officials, such as floodplain administrators and public information officers, and local real estate professionals.

1.2. Intended Use

This guide, developed on August 23, 2022, offers ideas and examples to help community officials and real estate professionals make flood risk information about properties conveniently available and easy to understand before and during real estate transactions.

---

[1] Federal Emergency Management Agency. "The cost of flooding". *National Flood Insurance Program: FloodSmart.* Accessed August 1, 2022, https://www.floodsmart.gov/cost-flooding.

2. Local Best Practices for Disclosing Flood Risk

As Table 1 illustrates, community officials and real estate agents can implement a range of practices and leverage many types of resources to increase flood risk awareness and risk-informed decision-making among homeowners and potential homebuyers.

Table 1. Examples of Local Flood Risk Disclosure Best Practices

Community Best Practices	Real Estate Agent Best Practices
▪ Provide public information to potential homeowners about high-risk flood areas in the community. Examples of public information include maps, interactive applications, zone definitions, and links to FEMA flood resources. ▪ Educate potential homeowners of the importance of flood insurance and where and how to acquire it. ▪ Partner with and provide support to real estate agents, such as offering templates for brochures and other communications materials, training, recognition, and tools to help get flood risk information into the hands of prospective buyers. ▪ Provide property-specific flood mitigation information to the public, such as tiling basements, raising outdoor mechanical equipment, or installing floodproofing technologies, coupled with available assistance such as grant or rebate opportunities. ▪ Provide information about the costs and benefits of mitigation to the public, including how mitigation actions can increase home values and reduce insurance premiums even if the home is located in harm's way.	▪ Identify if the homes being sold or shown are in high-risk areas. ▪ Add flood risk and flood insurance information to property listings and brochures. ▪ Review flood risk information and other home features with homebuyers. ▪ Help sellers and homebuyers understand cost-effective options for protecting their home's value and mitigating their flood risk. ▪ Help homebuyers consider flood insurance premiums in their budget and monthly principal, interest, taxes, and insurance (PITI) payment estimates. ▪ Partner with contractors and inspectors who can advise on property risk characteristics (e.g., low first floor elevations, signs of past flood damage, finished below-grade basements in the floodplain) and cost-effective mitigation options.

The subsequent sections highlight five communities (see Figure 1) that have implemented best practices for disclosing flood risk during real estate transactions. These five represent differing geographies with all manner of demographic characteristics and flood hazard concerns. They each have implemented best practice public information programs and real estate disclosure practices related to flood risks, tailored for their specific needs.

Figure 1. Community Spotlights

2.1.   Kenosha County, Wisconsin

Quick Links

- [Flood Information](#)
- [Maps including Flood Hazards](#)
- [Homeowner Brochure](#)

Community Characteristics

- 169,151 people
- Suburban
- Great Lakes Flood Hazards
- 72,740 Housing Units
- Median Household Income of $66,595
- Median Home Value of $188,400
- 66.4% of Housing Units are Owner-Occupied

Source: U.S. Census 2020

Kenosha County is in the southeastern part of Wisconsin, west of Lake Michigan with its largest city, Kenosha, on the shoreline. Kenosha has a growing population and development in or near the floodplain, which makes disclosing flood risk to potential homebuyers important. The county's goal is to have locally accessible, current, and credible information that allows the public to become better educated about flood risk and management in their own neighborhoods.

The desire to help residents and other potential homeowners make informed decisions about flood risk, avoidance, and other natural resource concerns related to property ownership is at the heart of the information Kenosha County makes available through their website (see Quick Links). The county's website includes interactive maps, FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs), flood insurance details, emergency management information, FEMA links, a flood mitigation plan, and a citizen preparedness page.

Kenosha County developed their interactive mapping tool to help the public research property they already own or are considering for purchase. It identifies floodplains and provides information about local natural resources, such as nearby bodies of water and soil types. Residents can view other features, including zoning areas and aerial photography. Real estate agents and potential homebuyers can easily locate properties of interest and clearly identify floodplains, equipping agents and sellers to disclose flood risk and homebuyers to make risk-informed decisions.

The Kenosha County Register of Deeds also provides real estate records via a web-based tool, Landshark, which locates and retrieves land records. While real estate data retrieval has a fee, the public site lets real estate agents and potential homebuyers review a property's flood history.

Additionally, the Wisconsin Realtors Association (WRA) offers a flood brochure for homebuyers that details information for potential homebuyers purchasing or building a home in or near a floodplain. The WRA website provides additional sources of information about flood hazards for clients.

For Kenosha County, a major component in their flood risk management evolution is using a variety of formats and locations to share information. In addition to brochures, pamphlets, and interactive mapping, the county's online newsletter covers a variety of topics related to planning, zoning, and

conservation. Floodplain management and flood mitigation topics are frequently included. Newsletter information has been a major component in keeping the website's information current.

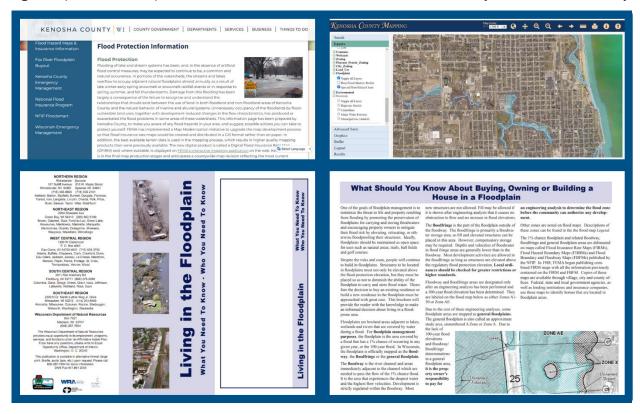Figure 2 provides examples of the flood risk information available to homebuyers in Kenosha County.

Figure 2: Examples of Kenosha County's Flood Risk Disclosure Products

2.2.   Pinellas County, Florida

Quick Links

- Flood Information
- Flood Maps
- Disclosure Program
- Homeowner Brochure

Community Characteristics

- 959,107 people
- Urbanized Area
- Coastal Flood Hazards
- 517,744 Housing Units
- Median Household Income of $56,419
- Median Home Value of $219,800
- 68.1% of Housing Units are Owner-Occupied

Source: U.S. Census 2020

Pinellas County is a peninsula on the west-central coast of Florida, sharing the shoreline with the Gulf of Mexico and about 24 miles southwest of Tampa. Due to the tropical atmosphere and location by the Gulf of Mexico, the county has a history of flooding and is entirely within flood hazard areas. As such, Pinellas County has developed a proactive Floodplain Management Program focused on updating available flood risk data and maps. The county's goal is to keep all residents reasonably safe from flooding and has done so by establishing guidance documents and tools to educate their communities on flood risks and hazards.

Pinellas County's comprehensive website (see Quick Links) informs its citizens of flooding risks. This public-facing website includes interactive maps, links to FEMA information, a breakdown of the CRS and applicable premium discounts, and fillable flood elevation certificates, as well as flooding and flood insurance brochures and fact sheets.

Pinellas County's Flood Map Service helps residents understand their own flood risk. Its Geographic Information System (GIS) data shows county floodplains, storm surge areas, and county flood hazard areas (FHAs), among other risks.

Additionally, the county partnered with the Pinellas Realtor Organization (PRO) to form the Pinellas County Real Estate Flood Disclosure Program, with three main components: a disclosure application, the flood information and disclosure brochure, and classes. The county provides training classes for real estate agents to equip them with flood risk knowledge to pass on to potential homebuyers.
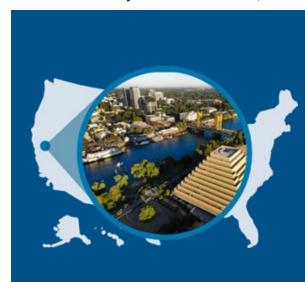
Outreach opportunities with real estate agents, coupled with the up-to-date Flood Map Service, is critical to the success of Pinellas County's flood risk disclosure initiatives and resident education.

Figure 3 provides examples of the flood risk information available to homebuyers in Pinellas County.

Figure 3: Examples of Pinellas County's Flood Risk Disclosure Products

2.3. The City of Sacramento, California

Quick Links

- Flood Information
- Flood Maps
- Homeowner Brochure
- Agent Flyer

Community Characteristics

- 522,754 people
- Urbanized Area
- Inland Riverine Flood Hazards
- 202,774 Housing Units
- Median Household Income of $65,847
- Median Home Value of $361,300
- 49.8% of Housing Units are Owner-Occupied

Source: U.S. Census 2020

The City of Sacramento is in the California Central Valley at the confluence of the Sacramento and American Rivers. Several stream systems and small tributaries pass through Sacramento to provide drainage and dams and levees protect the city, but flooding remains a great threat to Sacramento and its residents. Preparing residents to know their flood risk and associated property flood insurance requirements was the city's primary motivation in creating a flood risk awareness and disclosure program.

The city's website (see Quick Links) includes a "Flood Ready" section with background information on the river and tributary systems surrounding the area, as well as details on floodplains, flood protection, flood warning systems, flood insurance, links to FEMA, interactive maps, and elevation certificates. Flood maps on the website allow residents to review maps displaying areas dependent on levees, the Natomas and the South Sacramento floodplains, flood depths, rescue and evacuation maps, and links to FEMA FIRMs.

The city partnered with Sacramento County and the Sacramento Association of Realtors to develop a flood risk brochure with facts and useful tips about flood hazards for existing and prospective homeowners. The city also produced a Real Estate Agents Guide for disclosing flood hazards with disclosure and flood insurance tips and how to determine if a property is in a Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA).

Furthermore, Sacramento worked with the county, other incorporated communities, and special districts to update the countywide 2021 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP). The LHMP offers a long-term strategy for the community to reduce disaster-related losses and damages.

A main drivers of Sacramento's flood risk disclosure success is engaging key frontline stakeholders, such as real estate agents, to disseminate the city's flood hazard messages and raise awareness for homebuyers. Sacramento includes real estate agents in their Program for Public Information (PPI); this committee meets annually to review brochures and gives real estate agents the opportunity to provide valuable feedback to the city and improve public-facing information.

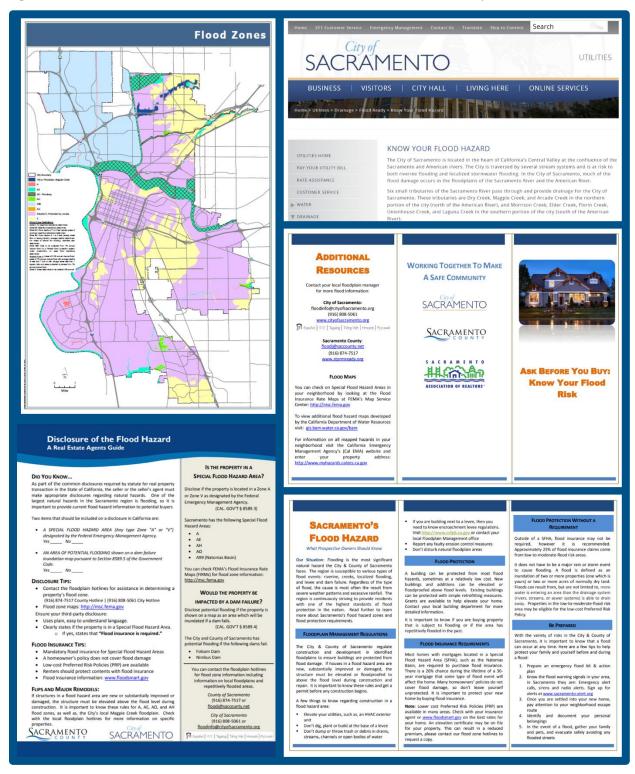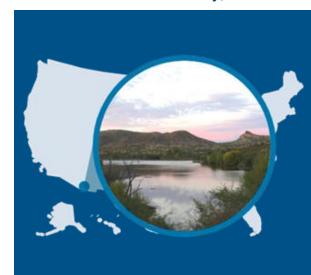Figure 4 provides examples of the flood risk information available to homebuyers in Sacramento.

Figure 4: Examples of Sacramento's Flood Risk Disclosure Products

2.4. Santa Cruz County, Arizona

Quick Links

- Flood Information
- Flood Maps
- Homeowner Brochure

Community Characteristics

- 47,669 people
- Rural Area
- Inland Riverine Flood Hazards
- 18,951 Housing Units
- Median Household Income of $41,424
- Median Home Value of $152,700
- 67.8% of Housing Units are Owner-Occupied

Source: U.S. Census 2020

Santa Cruz County is in southern Arizona, adjacent to the U.S.-Mexico border and is one of the smallest counties by area in the state. The Santa Cruz River runs through the western side of the county, making flooding a concern during heavy rainfall.

As a rural community, it is not feasible for many residents to drive to county offices where the Flood Control District office is located. To reach as many residents as possible, Santa Cruz County's website (see Quick Links) provides comprehensive flood information and resources to residents about their risk.

The easy-to-navigate website has helpful links, flood insurance purchase requirements, handouts on procedures for development in flood-prone areas, flood protection assistance, floodplain location maps, elevation certificates, and information brochures for potential homebuyers. Additionally, residents can submit the county's customizable Flood Hazard Information Sheet online to obtain property-specific flood risk and hazard information.

The county website has a GIS page with useful maps available for search, including National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) radar and watersheds, county zoning, a parcel search feature, and more. The county became a FEMA Cooperating Technical Partner in 2003 and has since worked to remap their flood risk using new mapping technologies and local input to update flood hazard data.

Finally, the county website also offers links to several public brochures. "Developing your Floodplain Property" has information on the restrictions, exceptions, and requirements associated with properties in county floodplains, and the county's flood insurance fact sheet details how flood insurance works and describes mandatory purchase requirements for county residents.

The county engages directly with high-volume users of their flood risk information such as real estate agents and contractors as well. When county forms, methods, flood risk data, or other flood risk information changes, the county reaches to stakeholders at least a month in advance to help them adjust their processes prior to implementation.

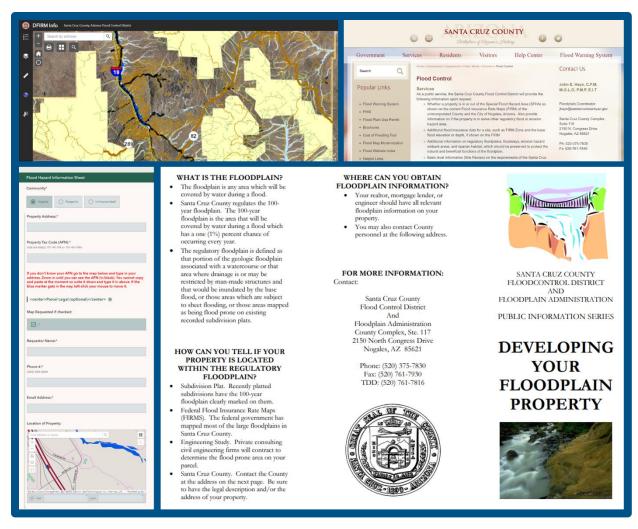Figure 5 provides examples of flood risk information available to homebuyers in Santa Cruz County.

Figure 5: Examples of Santa Cruz County's Flood Risk Disclosure Products

2.5.   The Village of Sugar Grove, Illinois

Quick Links

- Flood Information
- Homeowner Brochure

Community Characteristics

- 9,261 people
- Suburban Area
- Inland Riverine Flood Hazards
- 3,464 Housing Units
- Median Household Income of $110,607
- Median Home Value of $292,000
- 95.2% of Housing Units are Owner-Occupied

Source: U.S. Census 2020

Sugar Grove is a village in southern Kane County, about 50 miles west of downtown Chicago. The City of Aurora and the Fox River are to the east of the village.

Sugar Grove has a history of flooding after heavy rainfall and storm events. Flooding in the community generally originates from three possible sources: Blackberry Creek in the Blackberry Creek Watershed, the Welch Creek/Duffin Drain/Aurora Airport Drain in the Big Rock Creek Watershed, and Rob Roy Creek in the Big Rock Creek Watershed.

Sugar Grove attributes its success to the transparency of their flood risk information. Residents of Sugar Grove can access property-specific flood risk information resources such as FEMA FIRMs and elevation certificates at the Community Development Department. The village website (see Quick Links) also offers additional flood-related resources such as links to the Kane County Water Resources Department, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and FEMA. The village also has an informational brochure that real estate agents can use on listings and when consulting with potential homebuyers, which offers local flood hazards, flood insurance information, drainage maintenance, terminology, and links to available flood map information.

The village informs homebuyers and other stakeholders such as builders and developers directly when a property is in or adjacent to a floodplain. The village also provides information about the floodplain development regulations and flood insurance requirements that are applicable to those properties. However, the most decisive element of Sugar Grove's flood risk management program has been to protect the floodplain from development. Community leaders recognized that the best way to prevent losses due to flooding is to avoid placing improvements in the floodplain in the first place.

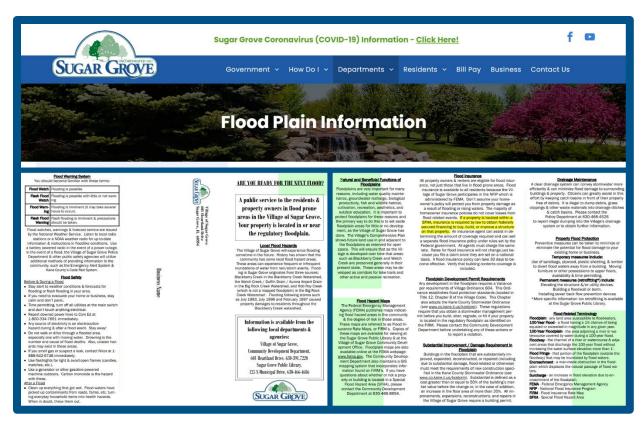Figure 6 provides examples of flood risk information available to homebuyers in Sugar Grove.

Figure 6: Examples of Sugar Grove's Flood Risk Disclosure Products

Appendix A. Communities Receiving Credit for Community Rating System (CRS) Activity Series 340 for Local Flood Risk Disclosure Practices

List of communities with web links, where possible, receiving Disclosure of the Flood Hazard (DFH) and Real Estate Agents' Brochure (REB) credit in CRS.

State	County	Community	Links
Arizona	Maricopa	City of Phoenix	City of Phoenix Flood Resources
	Mohave		Mohave County - Flood Control District
	Pima		Pima County Flood Resources
		Town of Marana	Town of Marana Flood Resources
	Santa Cruz		Santa Cruz Flood Resources
California	Lake	City of Clearlake	City of Clear Lake Flood Resources
	Orange	City of Yorba Linda	City of Yorba Linda Emergency Resources
	Sacramento		Flood Zone Information (saccounty.gov)
		City of Sacramento	City of Sacramento Flood Resources
	San Diego	City of Poway	City of Poway Flood Resources
	Santa Clara		Santa Clara Flood Resources
		Palo Alto	City of Palo Alto Flood Resources
	Ventura		Ventura County Flood Resources
Colorado	Arapahoe	City of Sheridan	Sheridan Flood Resource
	El Paso		Flooding Preparedness and Recovery - El Paso County Administration
		City of Colorado Springs	Colorado Springs Flood Resources
		City of Fountain	City of Fountain Flood Resources
		City of Manitou Springs	Manitou Springs Flood Resources
		Green Mountain Falls	Green Mountain Falls Flood Resource
		Town of Palmer Lake	Palmer Lake Flood Resources
	San Miguel	Town of Telluride	Telluride Flood Resources
Florida	Lee		Lee County Flood Resources
		City of Sanibel	Sanibel Flood Resources

State	County	Community	Links
		Town of Fort Myers Beach	Fort Myers Flood Resources
	Marion	City of Ocala	Ocala Flood Resources
	Miami-Dade		Flood Protection - Miami-Dade County (miamidade.gov)
		City of Miami Beach	Miami Beach Flood Resources
	Monroe		Know Your Flood Risk | Monroe County, FL - Official Website (monroecounty-fl.gov)
		City of Key West	Key West Flood Resources
		City of Marathon	Marathon Flood Resources
	Pinellas		Pinellas County Flood Resources
		City of Indian Rocks Beach	Indiana Rocks Beach Flood Resources
		Town of Belleair	Belleair Flood Resources
	Sarasota		Sarasota Flood Resources
		City of North Port	North Port Flood Resources
	Volusia		Volusia County Flood Resources
		City of New Smyrna Beach	New Smyrna Beach Flood Resources
		City of South Daytona	South Daytona Flood Resources
		Daytona Beach Shores	Daytona Beach Shores Flood Resources
Illinois	Kane County	Village of Sugar Grove	Flood Plain Information (sugargroveil.gov)
Kansas	Sedgwick	City of Bel Aire	Bel Aire Flood Resources
Kentucky	Jefferson	Government of Metro Louisville/Jefferson	Louisville MSD Flood Resources
Louisiana	Jefferson Parish	City of Gretna	Gretna Flood Resources
			Flood Preparedness Information (jeffparish.net)
		City of Kenner	Kenner Flood Resources
		City of Westwego	Westwego Flood Resources
		Town of Jean Lafitte	Town of Jean Lafitte Flood Resources
	St. Charles Parish		St. Charles Parish Flood Resources

State	County	Community	Links
	St. John the Baptist Parish		[St. John The Baptist Parish Flood Resources](#)
	Terrebonne Parish		[Terrebonne Parish Flood Resources](#)
Massachusetts	Barnstable	Town of Eastham	[Eastham Flood Resources](#)
		Town of Harwich	[Harwich Flood Resources](#)
		Town of Mashpee	[Mashpee Flood Resources](#)
		Town of Orleans	[Orleans Flood Resources](#)
		Town of Provincetown	[Provincetown Flood Resources](#)
		Town of Sandwich	[Sandwich Flood Resources](#)
Missouri	Jefferson	City of Arnold	[Arnold Flood Resources](#)
Montana	Custer	City of Miles City	[Miles Flood Resources](#)
New Jersey	Atlantic	Borough of Longport	[Longport Flood Resources](#)
		City of Margate City	[Margate City Flood Resources](#)
	Cape May	Borough of Avalon	[Avalon Flood Resources](#)
		Borough of Cape May Point	[Cape May Point Flood Resources](#)
		Borough of Stone Harbor	[Stone Harbor Flood Resources](#)
		City of Cape May	[Cape May Flood Resources](#)
		City of Ocean City	[Ocean City Flood Resources](#)
		City of Sea Isle City	[Sea Isle city Flood Resources](#)
	Ocean	Borough of Beach Haven	[Beach Haven Flood Resources](#)
North Carolina	Craven	City of New Bern	[New Bern Flood Resources](#)
Ohio	Licking		[Licking County Flood Resources](#)
Oklahoma	Wagoner, Osage	City of Tulsa	[City of Tulsa Flood Resources](#)
Oregon	Polk, Marion	City of Salem	[Salem Flood Resources](#)
Pennsylvania	Northumberland	Borough of Milton	[Milton Flood Resources](#)
South Carolina	Beaufort	City of Beaufort	[Beaufort Flood Resources](#)
		Town of Hilton Head Island	[Hilton Head Island Flood Resources](#)
	Charleston		[Charleston County Flood Resources](#)

State	County	Community	Links
		Town of Seabrook Island	Seabrook Island Flood Resources
		Town of Sullivan's Island	Town of Sullivan's Island Flood Resources
	Dorchester	City of North Charleston	North Charleston Flood Resources
South Dakota	Hutchinson	City of Parkston	Parkston Flood Resources
	Pennington	City of Rapid City	Rapid City Flood Resources
Vermont	Chittenden	Town of Colchester	Colchester Flood Resources
Wisconsin	Kenosha		Kenosha Flood Resources