

EMERGENCY PLANNING: FLOODING

The Use of Sandbags



Whose responsibility is it to protect their property from flooding?

It is a property or business owner's responsibility to protect their premises from flooding. Sandbags are one of the several options that can be used to help protect a property from flooding. The flood management team can also provide advise to residents and businesses about how they can protect their properties from flooding. Please contact floodmanagement@kirklees.gov.uk

Where and how does the Council decide where sandbags will go?

The Council maintains a very limited stock of sandbags to primarily prevent flooding of the highway. It has an overarching priority to protect the public at large.

Individual homeowner requests for the supply of sandbags will only be considered to protect occupied residential properties that are in imminent danger of flooding. They will not be supplied in advance (to meet customer requests) because it is very difficult to know which properties will actually flood. No two flood events are the same. This is to ensure our limited supply of sandbags are being deployed to properties where they will be needed. The request will be prioritised based on vulnerability and it is unlikely all requests will be met.

As part of the Council's emergency tactical response to a severe weather rain event, it may consider advance deployment of sandbags to known flooded communities. This depends on the advice and intelligence we have at the time, including the Met Offices' warning on the likelihood and impact of a flood event. Advance deployment can be helpful towards alleviating pressure on operational demands on the day (s) of the rain.

The Council will work on best endeavours and do not guarantee delivery. Sometimes the Council may get little notice of a Met Office warning for rain, giving no time to plan or supply routes that get blocked. Therefore, homeowners should plan in advance to protect their own properties.



Do sandbags work?

Traditionally, sandbags have been used to block doorways, drains and other openings into properties as well as to weigh-down manhole covers, garden furniture and to block sink, toilet and bath drains to prevent water backing up.

- ◆ They can keep water out for short periods which can be improved by using them in conjunction with plastic sheeting.
- ◆ They can filter out some muddy sediments found in flood waters.
- ◆ They are cheap and easy to obtain.

However, sandbags are relatively ineffective when compared to purpose-designed flood protection products.

Some of the pitfalls

- ◆ They take time to fill (approximately one hour to fill 12 sandbags).
- ◆ They can be difficult to handle.
- ◆ Laying them can be very time-consuming.
- ◆ It is difficult to place sandbags in water and particularly in running water.
- ◆ Sandbags do seep water even when well-stacked and trodden into place.

As a result, we strongly encourage residents and businesses to use purpose made flood protection products, such as flood boards, non-return valves for plumbing and air brick covers. Please contact floodmanagement@Kirklees.gov.uk for further advice.

This advice leaflet is a general guide and the advice may not be suitable to meet your individual or property needs.



How to use sandbags

You can buy unfilled sandbags and a supply of sand from most DIY stores and builders merchants, but remember that if there is a flood expected in your area demand may exceed supply as people rush to buy them.

Each sandbag will need approximately need 15kg of sand. You should use sharp, not soft, sand. This is a two-person job: one to hold the bag open and one to fill, do not fill bags more than half full.

Building a sandbag wall is a physically demanding activity so it is important that all those involved are fit enough to carry out the work. Use safe manual handling techniques.

You'll need at least 6 sandbags to keep out 20cm depth of water for a standard door opening. A high sandbag wall will require expert advice as they will need to withstand large water pressures, as failure or collapse of the sandbag wall could pose a danger to the structure of the house or anyone nearby.

What to do when placing the bags

- ◆ Clear any debris from the area where the bags are to be placed.
- ◆ If you can, put a large sheet of heavy-duty plastic between the sandbags and the wall of your house.
- ◆ Place the bags lengthways, tucking the open end under the filled half of the bag and position it pointing into the direction of water flow.
- ◆ Place bags in layers. Like a brick wall, make sure that in the next layer each bag overlaps the one below by half.
- ◆ Stamp bags firmly into place to eliminate gaps and create a tight seal.
- ◆ To lay sandbags in a doorway, it may be necessary to empty some of the contents out or shape the sandbags to achieve a good fit without overlapping.



Disposal of sandbags

Sandbags tend to retain contaminants such as sewage and oils when they come into contact with floodwater. Ensure you wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly when handling.

If your sandbag has NOT come into contact with any flood water

- ◆ Store in a dry place so it can be used again.
- ◆ Split the bag open and use the sand in your garden.
- ◆ Place the empty bag in your general waste bin or take to your nearest recycling centre. <https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/your-property-bins-recycling/household-waste-recycling-centres.aspx>

It is encouraged unused sandbags can be kept in a dry shady place so they can be used again if needed in the future. Sacking material is normally biodegradable and will perish if left in place for a long time.

If the sandbag HAS come into contact with flood water

- ◆ You will need to book a bulky waste collection via our website at <https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/your-property-bins-recycling/bulky-household-waste.aspx>
- ◆ You should inform workers of contamination.



What are the alternatives to Sandbags?

As an alternative to traditional sandbags, manufacturers have developed modern versions which do not use sand. They are lighter and can be placed in areas not suitable for sandbags. Some products require hydrating prior to use in a flood situation making them lighter and easier to handle and store.

You can find suppliers of modern non-sandbags by searching online for the National Flood Forum Blue Pages Directory <http://bluepages.org.uk/>

If you use these products, remember to follow the instructions provided by the manufacturer as they may have to be used differently to guidance provided in this leaflet for traditional sandbags.

In an emergency you can use alternatives such as pillowcases or refuse sacks and fill them with garden soil.

Remember

- ◆ Always wear gloves and wash hands after handling sandbags
- ◆ Always lift sandbags using safe techniques to avoid causing injury
- ◆ Ensure sand does not wash into watercourses, drains and gullies as it may cause blockages and possibly flooding!

Email: floodmanagement@kirklees.gov.uk

Visit: www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/flooding-and-drainage/reduce-risk-of-flooding.aspx