

INTRODUCTION

Many residents have been affected by the recent record rainfall we have experienced and Mount Alexander Shire Council is asking residents to be patient as staff work through a long list of customer requests as a result of the damage caused by the storms.

Residents are assured that all requests will be investigated and responded to at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime the following will provide answers to some commonly asked questions.

Why are we experiencing so much flooding in Mount Alexander?

Following a ten year drought the region has experienced several major storms in the last two years.

These storms have led to record rainfalls. For example, on 27 February Castlemaine experienced 59.0mm of rain followed by 97.8mm the on 28 February, far exceeding the February mean rainfall of 38.7mm.

Because these storms occurred in close succession, the capacity of the soil and water storages to absorb more water became quite limited. Therefore, more water that fell in subsequent storms remained as overland run-off which in turn resulted in more flooding.

When is the Council going to fix the drainage problem that I reported?

In the days following the flooding, Council received over 1,300 calls from the community. Council officers responded to these requests in order of urgency.

These requests were prioritised on the basis of responding first to those that involved water inside homes and businesses, second to those that involved water in outbuildings and sheds and finally those involving water in yards and paddocks.

Response to requests for minor work such as clearing of drains, removal of debris from watercourses, pits and pipes has been undertaken. However, many other requests will require major infrastructure improvements to rectify the flooding problems experienced.

The Shire still has over 260 further drainage investigations to complete and have a number of staff working full time on this. These works are planned to be completed in the coming months.

What planning is Council going to undertake to ensure the effects of flooding events are minimised in our community?

A key objective of the 2009-2013 Council Plan is to support the community in responding to emergency events. Developing suitable solutions for stormwater drainage issues will provide the community with a greater level of protection against future flooding events.

Council is preparing briefs for engineering consultants to undertake comprehensive local area stormwater investigations in the critical areas affected by this significant flooding event. From these investigations drainage schemes will be prepared with budget estimates to enable Council to consider providing for future capital improvements works.

Council and the North Central Catchment Management Authority are currently applying for State Government funds to develop a Flood Management and Drainage Plan for the area surrounding Castlemaine. It is proposed the Plan will determine the potential impact of flood events on the township of Castlemaine, Campbell's Creek and Chewton. The Plan will assess potential mitigation options and guide the development of flood warning systems. Council has allocated \$50,000 in its draft budget towards the development of the Plan.

How do I lodge a request or check on the progress of my request?

You may register a request online at www.mountalexander.vic.gov.au by following the link Submit Online Service Request.

Online requests are provided with a request number, if you call to follow up, quoting this will assist us to speed up our response.

Why didn't our drains and pipes cope with the major storms?

In recent years, there have been significant changes to the amount of water that runs off properties in a storm. For example, large lawn areas have been replaced with paving and 'harder' surfaces. This, together with saturated soils from earlier storms, has led to more water running-off land and putting greater pressure on the drainage system.

As is the case across Australia, the Shire's stormwater drains are not designed to cope with rain falls of the intensity we have recently experienced. The drains in the shire are generally designed to cope with a 1 in 5 year storm. This is consistent with the design standards applied by other councils in Victoria. Generally water dissipated within a short time after heavy rains. The Council is in the process of procuring engineering advice to resolve drainage issues at key locations within the shire.

When will my road be fixed?

Many residents have logged requests for their road to be fixed as a result of the storms. In response, Council currently has nine crews working to reinstate washed out gravel roads and repair damaged sealed roads. This is a significant task which will take up to 12 months to complete.

What can I do to lessen the threat of flooding on my property?

Residents should ensure that the spouting, downpipes and drainage pits on your property are clear of any debris. There are some actions you can take to be prepared for floods and to minimise the potential for damage to your property:

- Check the condition of the roof and arrange for the repair of loose tiles, eaves and roof screws.
- Clean gutters and downpipes so water can drain away as quickly as possible.
- Trim trees and overhanging branches.
- Secure loose items around your property and garden that could cause damage if blown around in high winds such as garden furniture and toys).
- Ensure your home, contents and car insurance is current and covers your assets adequately – check your policy includes debris clean up and disposal costs.
- Identify where and how to turn off mains supply for water, power and gas.
- Store all poisons above ground level in case of flash flooding.
- Identify which indoor items you will need to raise or empty if flooding threatens your home (e.g. freezers and refrigerators).
- Purchase emergency essentials to have on hand, such as:
 - containers to store drinking water supplies
 - spare supply of fuel for use in your vehicle (ensure you store safely)
 - wide masking tape for windows

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- sandbags - hessian bags filled with sand to place over indoor drains to prevent sewerage backwash from flooding.

More information on being prepared for emergencies can be found on the Emergency Management section of Council's website at www.mountalexander.vic.gov.au

You are also encouraged to report any blocked stormwater drains that are located in your street to Council's Customer Service staff.

Why have people been allowed to build in low lying areas?

Prior to amalgamation planning regulations in relation to floods were limited. The Planning Scheme came into effect in 1999 to ensure that the general amenity of the area was not affected by new developments. The Planning Scheme does not automatically prevent landowners from building in low lying areas that may be subject to flooding or inundation. Rather, it requires Council to refer the matter to the North Central Catchment Management Authority who then determines whether flooding or inundation should prevent the development from occurring. Often this results in 'conditional' approval whereby the floor level of the building must be constructed above a certain level. These levels are set based on the best information available at the time that the application is made.

A previous flood study was undertaken for a portion of the town by the Rural Water Commission in 1986. This flood study is the basis for the 1 in 100 year flood levels for parts of Castlemaine. Campbell's Creek and Chewton do not have any planning scheme flood overlays and flood levels for Campbell's Creek are not available. The Council and the North Central Catchment Management Authority are currently applying for funding to undertake a Flood and Drainage Plan for the Castlemaine, Chewton, Campbell's Creek and Barkers Creek areas within the municipality to ensure more adequate flood mapping is available.