

Between 1900 and 2015, 1,859 people died in floods in Australia. The majority of these deaths occurred while attempting to drive through floodwater. Floods are ranked second only to heatwaves in terms of the total number of fatalities since 1960.¹

The facts:

- ▼ Since 1960, the highest number of fatalities due to floods have occurred in Qld and NSW, with the toll from these states accounting for 75% of all fatalities.
- ▼ Flood fatalities per capita since 1960 are the highest in the NT, where the statistics are five times more than NSW and at least three times more than Qld.
- ▼ Most flood related vehicle fatalities involve male drivers (84%).
- ▼ The majority of fatalities occur in minor or moderate floods.
- ▼ Most people who died after entering floodwaters were travelling home.
- ▼ Fatalities associated with 4WD vehicles have increased over the last two decades. In fact, 75% of all 4WD flood deaths have occurred since 2000.
- ▼ 45% of flood fatalities occurred during twilight or darkness, when visibility was reduced.¹
- ▼ Research has shown that many people simply ignore warnings and road closure signs. In one case, in 2015, in NSW, 84% of motorists were observed driving past road closure signs and entering floodwater. Most were men driving 4WD vehicles.²

The dangers of driving through floodwater:

- ▼ Research conducted by University of NSW demonstrates that as little as 15cm of water (the height of a standard pencil) is enough for some vehicles to start to float, reducing the driver's control and endangering occupants.³
- ▼ It can be very difficult to judge the depth and the speed of floodwater, and floodwater can rise up quickly.
- ▼ Research shows that cars can sink in just a few minutes, and many deaths from floods involve passengers trapped in submerged vehicles.⁴
- ▼ Moving floodwater can wash away the road surface creating hazardous driving conditions.⁵

Why do people drive through floodwater?

Some of the reasons that people may use to justify attempting to drive through floodwater include:

- ▼ Experience. Having successfully driven through floodwater in the past.
- ▼ Individual perceptions. Pressure to arrive at the destination. Situation perceived to be different to warnings. Avoid potential of being stranded. Lack of appeal of alternative routes.
- ▼ Social and environmental context. Pressures from other drivers to go through. Encouragement from others in the car. A sense of security that they will be rescued if something goes wrong. Witnessing other motorists successfully drive through.
- ▼ Self-efficacy judgements. Believing they have the skills and knowledge to drive through safely. Belief in their ability to assess and mitigate the risk presented by floodwater. Belief in the ability of their vehicle.⁶

The safest way to navigate floodwater is to not navigate it at all. Your life and the life of your passengers is not worth the risk.

What to do if you encounter floodwater:

- ▼ Do not attempt to drive through floodwater.
- ▼ Review your travel plans if you are planning to travel through an area which has experienced recent flooding or is expecting flooding.
- ▼ Obey road closures and check road conditions.⁷

For road and weather conditions listen to the ABC or local radio. Consult the BoM Weather and Flood Warning Service on 1300 659 210 or visit <http://www.bom.gov.au/australia/warnings>

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3. Ses.vic.gov.au. (2018). 15 to float: Never drive on flooded roads - News. [online] Available at: <https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/-/15-to-float-never-drive-on-flooded-roads-1> [Accessed 22 Oct. 2018].
4. Molly, F. (2018). Drivers risk death when driving into flood water: new study. [online] The Lighthouse. Available at: <https://lighthouse.mq.edu.au/article/drivers-risk-death-when-driving-into-floodwater-new-study> [Accessed 22 Oct. 2018].
5. Gissing, A., Haynes, K., Coates, L. and Keys, C. (2015). Would You Drive Through Flood Water? | Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC. [online] Bnhcrc.com.au. Available at: <http://www.bnhcrc.com.au/resources/poster/1977> [Accessed 22 Oct. 2018].
6. Hamilton, K., Peden, A., Keech, J. and Hagger, M. (2016). Deciding to drive through floodwater: A qualitative analysis through the lived experience. [online] Royal Life Saving Society - Australia. Available at: https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/22000/RLS_Floodwater_ReportLRv3.pdf [Accessed 22 Oct. 2018].
7. Dfes.wa.gov.au. (2018). DFES Cyclone and Flood - Driving in Flood Waters. [online] Available at: https://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/safetyinformation/cyclone/Factsheets/DFES-Cyclone_and_Flood-Driving_in_Flood_Waters.pdf [Accessed 22 Oct. 2018].