

## **SANDBAG POLICY**

### **Introduction**

During the floods of November 2000, in North Yorkshire and the City of York, sandbag supplies were stretched to breaking point as the responding agencies fought to hold back the rising floodwaters over a large geographical area.

At the same time there were thousands of calls from the public demanding sandbags with which to protect their properties. This placed further strain on both the local authority and the Environment Agency as they attempted to balance the priority dispersal of their already stretched sandbag supplies while meeting the needs of an anxious population.

It is, in the first place, the responsibility of the occupier or owner of a property to protect it against the ingress of floodwaters. However there will be occasions when assistance is sought in providing this protection. Most frequently this is by seeking the provision of sandbags from the local authority.

In the case of river flooding, the City of York Council will sandbag the identified "at risk" properties, in accordance with the Environment Agency Flood warnings, subject to availability of resources in both materials and labour. Contingency plans are in place to implement a temporary works program to prevent widespread flooding of both residential and commercial areas.

In the case of 'flash flooding' due to heavy rain, identified 'at risk' properties will be sandbagged, once again subject to availability of resources.

As the extent of flood prevention works cannot be predicted in advance of an event it is necessary for the Council to prioritise the distribution of sandbags according to the level of threat to the infrastructure and key installations within the authority's area. It is therefore essential that the City of York Council has a clear policy governing the supply of sandbags to the public during a major flood event.

### **The Strategic Aim**

The aim of the plans, and the works listed within them, is to prevent or mitigate the effects of flooding on the City of York. To that end decisions may be taken or priorities set which maximise the effect of that prevention or mitigation.

Hence key installations and public infrastructure may be given priority over individual residential or commercial properties.

## CITY OF YORK COUNCIL RIVER FLOOD EMERGENCY PLAN

**Policy**

In keeping with the strategic aim, priority will be given to the use of sandbags as follows;

- Repairs to existing flood defences, whether permanent or temporary,
- Construction of temporary works, as identified in the City of York Flood Plan to prevent flooding to large areas of the City affecting both residential and commercial properties. This includes works to protect areas not previously identified but which become known during a particular flooding incident and which meet these criteria.
- Key installations\* – Utility installations, hospitals, schools, communication centres, council buildings (e.g. residential homes) and operational emergency services premises.
- Critical transportation routes and other essential roads
- Individual residential or commercial properties

This policy will apply to flooding, whether caused by overtopping of main rivers, breaches of permanent or temporary defences or flash flooding caused by excess rain.

\* It will remain, in the first instance, the responsibility of the owners or operators of these installations to protect their own property.

**Public Supply**

Subject to availability, and the above priorities, sandbags from the Council's stock will only be made available to members of the public in the following circumstances:

- When the temporary works have been constructed and the flood waters are not anticipated to rise above existing defences.
- Where there is an **immediate** threat to individual properties, with the proviso that such release does not jeopardise the ability of the Council to achieve its strategic aim.

The facility offered to the public will be kept under constant review during the incident and may be withdrawn at any time if stocks reduce to a level where the authority would be unable to meet its strategic aim.

## CITY OF YORK COUNCIL RIVER FLOOD EMERGENCY PLAN

A charge may be levied for the provision of any sandbags or for assistance in constructing sandbag defences to premises other than those listed priorities set out under 'Policy' above.

**Sandbags will not be available for collection by the public from the Council's Depot at Hazel Court.**

**Council Assistance to Residents**

The level of assistance which the Council is able to offer individual residents will depend on the resources available at the time, the demands on that resource owing to the situation we are confronting and an objective view of the needs of the resident.

For example in **Case A** it may only be necessary to supply a number of sandbags to an able bodied householder whilst in **Case B** an elderly or disabled resident may require assistance in the building of the sandbag defences as well.

**Disclaimer**

The Council will employ its best endeavours to deliver sandbags to members of the public, but will not be held responsible for any damage caused by a delay in that delivery nor for any failure of sandbagging to prevent ingress of water to a property.

It is emphasised that it is the responsibility of the owner or occupier of a property to protect it against flooding and proprietary products are available which may provide a greater degree of protection than a simple sandbag wall. City of York Council does not provide endorsement to flood protection products. It is for the purchaser to decide if a specific product is suitable for their needs.

Further information on flood protection can be found on the Environment Agency web site: [www.environment-agency.gov.uk/subject/flood](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/subject/flood)

**Limitations of Sandbagging**

Sandbags will not totally prevent floodwater encroaching into property and householders/occupiers of 'at risk' properties should always remove articles to a safe location above the anticipated flood level.

Those building sandbag flood defences should also be aware that sandbags are exceptionally heavy and therefore there are health and safety considerations in their manual handling.

Advice as to the most effective method of building sandbag defences in order to ensure a good seal can be found on the council website at :

[http://www.york.gov.uk/content/45053/65341/Emergency\\_plans\\_for\\_flooding/How\\_to\\_build\\_a\\_sandbag](http://www.york.gov.uk/content/45053/65341/Emergency_plans_for_flooding/How_to_build_a_sandbag)

## CITY OF YORK COUNCIL RIVER FLOOD EMERGENCY PLAN

There are a number of web sites offering flood defence products to protect homes and commercial premises. People whose premises are at risk from flooding and who are serious about protecting their property should explore the practicality of the alternatives to sand bagging.

### Disposal of Sandbags

The responsibility for the safe and legal disposal of sandbags after a flooding event remains with the owner or occupier of the property. Filled sandbags **must not** be placed in wheelie bins for disposal as the collections are not meant for this sort of bulky item and residents could be liable for a statutory notice.

Failure to comply with a notice can result in a fixed penalty ticket for £100 or a court appearance with a maximum fine of £1000.

Where possible, used sandbags should be split and the contents spread over gardens and the bag itself placed in the household bin.

**City of York Council Communities and Neighbourhoods Directorate may, on request, collect sandbags for disposal, a charge may be levied for this service.**

It is **not** recommended that sandbags be kept and re-used as they may have been contaminated by the flood waters.

### Responsibility for the Policy

This policy is the responsibility of the Director of City Strategy who may delegate its operation on a day to day basis to an officer(s) of his/her choice.