

Flood Awareness Month – PODCAST 6: Impacts and Flood Categories

RUN TIME: 3 MIN 1 SECOND

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JEFF JOHNSON: For the public, when they look at a number along a river.... A flood stage is say, 15 feet – and then they have, incrementally it increases above that – 16, 17, 18. So, you know, one thing I think it's real important to let the public know about our National Weather Service website, they can actually see impacts at the various points along the river. For example, at 19 feet along this river, whatever river it is, you get flooding over roads. Kind of gives the public, then, an idea as to the impacts of what we're talking about. We also break that down into minor flooding, moderate flooding and major flooding, and they'll see that on our A-HIPS page, you know, or in our text products for that matter, with a river flood warning: "The National Weather Service has issued a river flood warning for the Des Moines River and we're expecting moderate flooding." What goes into that calculation?

JEFF ZOGG: What we call moderate, major, minor flooding – we have a set of definitions inside the National Weather Service that we use to categorize that. And essentially, minor flooding is when significant impacts begin to life and property along the river. You're talking about road closures, for example. It's not necessarily the same thing as "bank full," because the river could be out of its banks, but it may not be closing any roads. So there's – there's a big distinction between "bank full" and flood stage, which is where minor flooding begins. When you get to moderate flooding, you tend to have some evacuations starting, maybe some cities and towns are doing some things along the levees. Major flooding you can have larger scale evacuations, maybe some major roads, interstates that is being affected by, by the flood waters. Now of course we don't want to belittle the flooding anyone experiences. I mean, if I had a foot of water inside my house, I'd think it's major, regardless of what the National Weather Service calls it. But it's important to realize that we do categorize that for use with our other national partners. For example, other agencies such as the Corps of Engineers, the media, just to get a broad-scale picture recognizing that again, any one household – it can be a major deal for them if, if they're affected by flooding.

JEFF JOHNSON: Do these flood stages ever change, or are they set forever?

JEFF ZOGG: They're definitely not set forever, Jeff. We – we typically review them to make sure they're valid. We want to be sure that what we say when the river hits flood stage, there's actually impacts going on. One of the things that uh, is my job is to evaluate those – those flood stages, and as well as the thresholds for moderate and major flooding and propose changes if they're no longer valid. And maybe one of the reasons why they're no longer valid is could be development mitigation. Sometimes roads are raised, there's "buyouts" of flooded properties, so at one time, flood stage may have been valid but we need to raise it. And actually one way to view it is when we're raising flood stage, and raising moderate and major flood stage, it's almost a compliment to the community because it's showing that the flood impacts don't happen as easily as they did before. And again, it could be because of mitigation efforts.

JEFF JOHNSON: So hazard mitigation, completed by [Iowa] Homeland Security and Emergency Management, definitely paid dividends. I can attest to that. Thinking back to the major floods we've seen in the last 20 years in Iowa it's been very historic. And after every major flood there's been an infusion of

money into mitigation projects, which then, in turn, helps us down the road in lessening the impacts of similar flooding as we move forward. So that's outstanding, actually.

STEFANIE: Thank you, Jeff. Thank you, Jeff.

JEFF JOHNSON: Any– throw you a bone, there.