

Flash_Floods_Are_Deadly_2004.txt
FLASH FLOODS ARE DEADLY

1. Raging Arroyos
By Sam Scott

Flash floods are the number one weather related killer in the United States. More than half of the deaths are vehicle related. Much of this happens in the southwest where the unknowing encounter our mostly dry washes or arroyos.

A raging arroyo can have water moving at thirty miles per hour. Just six inches can knock you off your feet. Once the water level reaches the side of the vehicle, it can move it sideways. At a depth of two feet the water will wash most automobiles downstream. This even includes older heavy cars weighing two tons or more.

The raging water will pickup tree branches, fence posts, barbed wire, boulders and anything else the water can move. A photo sequence I saw recently showed a dry crossing with water just reaching it and within 10 seconds it was running about six inches deep, and in less than one minute the water was several feet deep.

A lady friend of ours was bringing her kids back from swimming lessons and attempted to cross a dry crossing heading into the development where they lived. It initially was running several inches of water when she started across. Before she could make it across the water was coming in her window. The full sized car stalled out and it was only luck and the grace of God she and her children survived. The car was abandoned in the wash and later towed home. The car was totalled.

If you like a little publicity, when it is storming here in the southwest you might make it to the evening news as everyone sees the public safety people retrieve you from the water. That way they can laugh at your stupidity. You will likely lose your vehicle as the

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arroyo makes a mess of it silting the engine and transmission as well as the interior. The solid objects moving in the water can literally destroy the body of a car.

Once you are retrieved, you will be cited (ticketed) for entering a flooded arroyo crossing. This is a moving violation and has a fine with it. It will also increase your insurance costs for years.

Here in Arizona we have what is called the "Stupid Motorist" law where you can be charged by every organization involved in your rescue. This can run you up to \$2,000.

A favorite of mine is "macho man" with his four-wheeler. This turkey thinks he is king kong and nothing can stop him. Well, let me tell you a raging arroyo can take out a four-wheeler just like any other vehicle. Moreover, it can take that \$20,000 to \$30,000 toy and make trash out of it in minutes.

As a long time resident of the southwest I have learned to treat arroyos with caution. Avoid if at all possible. If the rain storm is really intense, just stay at home until it stops and the water recedes.

Incidentally, it doesn't have to be raining at the crossing. It could be raining intensely almost anywhere upstream. Many's the time I have been driving in sunshine and come across an arroyo running water.

Your comments are welcome.

Sam Scott