

Elevated Home along Arkansas River Survives Christmas, 2015 Flood

JEFFERSON CO. --The Christmas weekend of 2015 is one that many residents in Arkansas will never forget. The holiday began with up to 10 inches of rain on December 24 and Christmas Day was drenched. The downpour finally came to an end on December 26, but not before causing widespread destruction.



Back view of the elevated house on cinderblocks
photo: Wayne Berggren/FEMA

Jefferson County was among the hardest hit areas. Hundreds of homes were inundated, roads were washed out and farmlands submerged.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, it was the most extensive and severe flooding event to strike the state since 1990.

John and Kathy Erwin live along the Arkansas River, and were prepared. They had elevated their home above the Base Flood Elevation (BFE) by a foot. While other homes in the neighborhood flooded, their home remained dry.

The couple completed construction of the home in 2000 and local codes required elevating the property at least a foot above the BFE.

“Now I wish I had gone up another foot,” said John Erwin.

The 5,000-square-foot cedar log home is located approximately 50 feet from the Arkansas River. The house is elevated on a continuous wall using 8”x16” inch cinderblocks. The Erwins finished construction in 2000. “It took me three years to complete the work,” he said.



Elevated houses sits above the floodwaters during the Christmas flood event. Photo courtesy of Kathy Erwin

This flood is a second within a year for the couple. “The river reached 45.96 feet during the spring flooding event of 2015 and 46.96 feet during the Christmas flood,” said Mr. Erwin. This very precise information comes from the hydraulic gauge the couple uses to keep them informed about river conditions. The system is a public service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.



Front view of the elevated home on cinderblocks. Photo: Jovce Price/FEMA

Watching the torrential rain on Christmas Day, Kathy Erwin read the gauge to discover a flood was eminent. The Erwins’ adult children and other holiday guests cut their celebrations short. All pitched in and began to move items from the garage to higher ground. Then, they evacuated.

When it was over, they could not immediately return home because the road was washed out. When they did return, the Erwins found mud and debris everywhere. The yard was destroyed and the cleanup “was a chore,” but the house remained unscathed, they said.

Additionally, the couple protects their home by participating in the Group Flood Insurance Program, issued by the National Flood Insurance Program. Details are available at <http://www.floodsmart.gov>

FEMA offers a number of free online resources for home and property owners. To get started, go to: www.fema.gov/safer-stronger-protected-homes-communities or <http://www.fema.gov/arkansas-disaster-mitigation>.

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