Recent severe flooding in Texas and Oklahoma once again bring the dangers of storm drains to the forefront.

From a property or road hazard standpoint, protective storm drain gratings/coverings can become clogged with debris causing floodwater to back up resulting in structure damage or creating impassable roadways.

Often, these coverings are removed or modified, leaving a relatively open culvert or pit which people can fall or get swept into by the force of moving water. By the way, storm drain covers can weigh as much as 300-400 lbs.

A significant problem in many communities involves the theft of storm drain covers. These are sold as scrap for a little as $20-$30 but can cost several hundred dollars to replace. The end result is a dangerous open sump or box that may be obscured by flood water.

Storm drains are designed to capture surface waters and divert them to main drainage systems, canals, bayous, etc. However, they can become death traps when a person is inadvertently trapped in a grating or swept into an open culvert due to powerful “suction forces” generated by moving water.

Once trapped, a person can drown when swept several hundred yards through drain pipes or if stuck in grating, can drown or die from hypothermia while awaiting rescue.

Is your department prepared to affect rescues from these types of hazards (which are considered confined spaces)? Are they trained in “underwater” rescue techniques? Have you ASSESSED THE HAZARD?


Eddie Pyle, PM,RN
FETI EMS/Safety Manager
Fire Captain drowns in drainage pipe after being swept away in a ditch

CLAREMORE, Oklahoma - Capt. Jason Farley stepped into a ditch while evacuating residents from flooding. He lost his footing in the rapidly moving water and was pulled into the drainpipe along with another firefighter that tried to rescue him. The other firefighter was ejected after traveling 200 yards in the pipe, and survived the near drowning. Capt. Farley perished in the drain pipe.

PREPARE - WATCH OUT IN FLOODING