

## **Channel Migration Zone Frequently Asked Questions**

1. *What is a Channel Migration Zone (CMZ)?*

The CMZ is an area where the main part of a river changes location in the valley floor, either by an abrupt change (or more gradually by erosion or destabilization of the channel banks). Channel migration is different from other flood risks where floodwater may rise above the river bank only to drain back in after the flood. After a river has migrated it may occupy its new channel for months or years.

2. *When do river channels typically migrate?*

They are most likely to migrate during a flood event; however location change can be a gradual process as well.

3. *What part of the CMZ does Pierce County regulate?*

CMZ studies can show areas of severe, moderate and low migration risk. Pierce County regulates only the severe CMZ areas, which have the highest risk of being occupied by a river. These areas are deemed high hazard and high-risk for life, safety and damage to buildings and other property improvements.

4. *Why does Pierce County regulate the CMZ and other flood hazard areas?*

Promoting public safety and general welfare is the main reason, but it goes beyond that. Although loss of life during disasters has been greatly reduced in recent times, property damage losses are skyrocketing. This damage costs everyone money in the form of emergency services, relief for devastated families, and repairs to expensive public infrastructure (roads and levees).

5. *Which streams or rivers have regulated CMZs?*

Pierce County only regulates streams and rivers where CMZ mapping has been completed and adopted, including the Puyallup, Carbon and White Rivers.

Additionally, South Prairie Creek, the Upper, Middle and Lower Nisqually River, Greenwater River and Mashel River have been identified in the county's flood hazard regulations as needing CMZ mapping in the future.

6. *What if I currently have a house in an adopted, mapped CMZ? What does this mean to me?*

Houses currently within a CMZ are at risk, but they have been grandfathered, provided they aren't substantially damaged by a flood or from the river channel migrating. If a house in the CMZ is substantially damaged by some other non-flood catastrophe such as fire or earthquake, it can be rebuilt in that location. Minor repairs, remodeling and improvements can be made to the house, up to an amount equal to 40 percent of the value of the house as determined by the county building official. CMZ areas often overlap with other hazard areas, such as the FEMA floodway, so be aware that other restrictions on repair and rebuilding may already apply to your home.

7. *I have a vacant piece of property that lies within a CMZ and I want to build on it - what can I do?*

The flood hazard regulations do not allow for new structures to be built in severe CMZ areas. These areas are deemed too hazardous for people to live or build permanent structures in. CMZs can be used for recreational, agricultural or other, similar uses.

8. *What can I do with my property if it lies outside of the severe CMZ but within areas mapped as low or moderate?*

The flood hazard regulations do not apply to moderate or low risk CMZ areas. This information is advisory only for people to consider should they choose to build or live near a river. Property located in a moderate CMZ is still at risk of being swept away by the river.

9. *What if I live behind a levee? Does that protect me from a CMZ?*

Except for the lower Puyallup River downstream from the City of Puyallup, Pierce County levees are not considered adequate to provide protection from river migration. Experience has shown that the river has more than enough power to move big rocks from the levees downstream. When levees are damaged, they typically are repaired if the river still occupies the same channel. However, if the river has removed a section of levee and now occupies a new channel behind the levee, it is not feasible to 'put the river back'.

10. *How can I get more information about the CMZ and my property?*

Visit our webpage at [www.piercecountywa.org/water](http://www.piercecountywa.org/water) and scroll down to Channel Migration Zone (CMZ) Studies. This site is regularly updated with information about meetings, new developments and decisions.