What to Document When Water Collects Near Your Home

Water may be gone by the time someone comes to look. A dated record of where it appeared, how it traveled, and how long it stayed gives an engineer something to compare with the site visit. Use the same approach after rain, irrigation, or snowmelt.

Record what happened and when

Write down the date, what was happening when you first saw the water, and when you checked again. Note whether you saw it during the event or found the effects later. If water collects in more than one place, give each spot an ID. For example, “P1, low spot beside the back walk, still wet at 4 p.m.” Mark an estimate as approximate and identify any weather or irrigation record you used.

Use the same location IDs during later events. Record whether the water disappears, returns, or reaches a door, window well, or other opening. Photos from a dry day can show the same landmarks for comparison.

Sketch the route water takes

Draw the house, roof downspouts, paved areas, walks, visible drains, and the places where water collects. Sketch arrows for movement you actually observed. Use a question mark for a section you could not follow, such as a pipe disappearing underground. Label where you last saw the water and any visible outlet. A sketch gives the engineer locations to check against the site grades. [USGS, Surface Runoff and the Water Cycle]

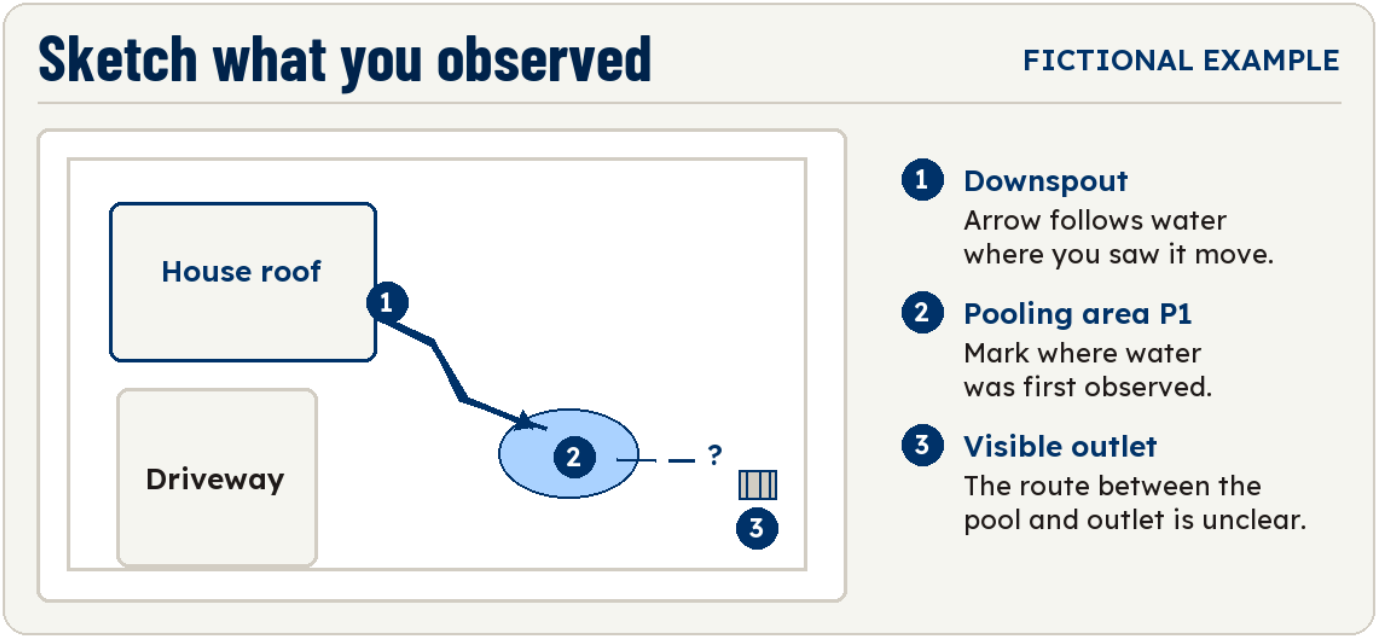

Figure 1. On a sketch of your lot, label the source you observed, give the pooling area an ID, and stop the arrow where the route becomes unclear. Fictional RES illustration.

Photograph from accessible locations

Take a wide image with a fixed landmark, a middle view showing the route or grade, and a detail of the wet area, drain, or discharge point. When possible, photograph the same spot from the same position on another day. Add the location, direction of view, date, and time to the filenames or a photo list. Stay on accessible ground and leave floodwater, unstable areas, and places you cannot see off the photo route. RES Project Photo Guide · CDC floodwater safety



Figure 2A. Wider view below the brick-wall window, June 16, 2023, at 1:03 p.m. as recorded in the image file. The window locates the extension. RES Media gallery, RES-M0410. Top edge cropped to omit the house number.



Figure 2B. Lower view of the same area, June 16, 2023, at 1:01 p.m. as recorded in the image file. The foreground shows the adjacent soil. Weather and time since rainfall were unrecorded for both views. RES Media gallery, RES-M0408.

Send a record an engineer can use

Send the dated notes, sketch, labeled photos, and any survey, drainage plans, previous work records, or reports you have. Name the decision you need to make, such as whether to commission an assessment before replacing a patio. Ask which areas the engineer needs to see and whether the visit can address your question or will require further information.

Rain and runoff log

Record	Your notes
Date, time, weather or irrigation	
Location ID and nearest landmark	
Direction observed and last visible point	
Time first seen, time checked again, photo IDs	

What to do next

Preparing for a visit? Read What a Residential Drainage Assessment Looks At.

Recording damage from one storm or flood? Use What to Record After a Storm or Flood.