

What is a Levee?



The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) defines a levee as a “man-made structure, usually an earthen embankment, designed and constructed in accordance with sound engineering practices to contain, control, or divert the flow of water so as to provide protection from temporary flooding.” Levees are sometimes referred to as dikes.

As the name implies, earthen levees are made from earth, or soil. The soil used to construct a levee is compacted to make the levee as strong and stable as possible. To protect against erosion and scouring, levees can be covered with everything from grass and gravel to harder surfaces like stone (riprap), asphalt, or concrete.

A floodwall is a vertical wall that is built to do the same thing as a levee. Typically made of concrete or steel, floodwalls often are erected in urban locations where there is not enough room for a levee. Floodwalls sometimes are constructed on a levee crown to increase the levee’s height.