

PREFACE

Natural disasters are inevitable, and we have seen how the emotional and financial costs of coping with them can be overwhelming. The good news is communities all across our nation are restructuring themselves to reduce the effects of natural disasters.

FEMA sponsors two mitigation programs to help communities take a proactive approach to reducing the effects of disasters: the Flood Mitigation Assistance Program and the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. This handbook explains the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and leads you through the process of implementing one form of mitigation: property acquisition.

Property acquisition is effective because it is a *permanent* form of mitigation. It makes FEMA funds available to you for buying property in flood-prone areas, and dedicating that property to use as open space for all time. It enables you to remove people from harm's way . . . forever. In that way, it reduces future emotional and financial costs associated with your community's disaster response, recovery, and repair.

Many States and communities have implemented property acquisition projects, some of which have already stood the tests of natural disasters. To learn how effective property acquisition can be, read the example in "Property Acquisition at Work," which follows on the next page.

We encourage you to carefully consider the mitigation options available to you and choose the best one for your community. We hope this handbook will help you through that decision and, if you choose property acquisition, through the property acquisition process.

PROPERTY ACQUISITION AT WORK

The Missouri Buyout Program¹

The 1993 Midwestern flood was a record breaker both in terms of river levels and duration. Of the nine Midwestern States affected, the State of Missouri was the hardest hit. State officials estimate damages totaled \$3 billion.

Over 216,000 households were located in Missouri's designated floodplains. Many of those households were affected by the 1993 flood, which created a unique window of opportunity to create more permanent solutions to Missouri's increasingly frequent flooding problems. Both flood survivors and unaffected taxpayers began to call for a way to alleviate future vulnerability to flooding. The largest response was for a buyout (property acquisition). Like many States that suffered from that disaster, Missouri designed and implemented a buyout program. The State received close to \$100 million, which flowed down to the local communities. One reason Missouri's program was so successful was its emphasis on a collaborative partnership among Federal, State, and local governments.

No one imagined that Missouri would get an opportunity to test its buyout program's effectiveness so soon when the flood of 1995 struck. The 1995 flood was the third-largest flood of record in many places, despite the fact that it was considerably less devastating than its predecessor two years earlier. More importantly, the buyout program resulting from the 1993 flood had removed 2,000 families from harm's way by the time the 1995 flood struck.

¹ Extracted from *Out of Harm's Way/The Missouri Buyout Program*, prepared by the Missouri State Emergency Management Agency.

St. Charles County, Missouri

A good example of the success of Missouri's buyout program is St. Charles County, which is on the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. In St. Charles County alone, the combined costs of the 1993 flood exceeded \$160 million.

The buyout program in St. Charles County acquired 1,374 properties located in the 100-year floodplain. These properties included over 560 single-family residences and 3 mobile home parks with a combined total of 814 mobile home pads, approximately 684 of which were occupied. When the 1995 spring rains hit, 1,000 families (approximately 2,500 people) were out of harm's way thanks to the buyout program. St. Charles County Planning Director, Steve Lauer estimates that at least 95 percent of those acquired properties would have flooded again during the 1995 disaster.

The table below compares and contrasts the costs of disaster assistance in St. Charles County resulting from the 1993 and 1995 floods. St. Charles County's property acquisition project cost \$13,700,810 to fully implement. However, by comparing the costs of the 1993 and 1995 floods, you can see the project's benefits far

St. Charles County Cost Comparison 1993 And 1995 Floods

Flood	Number of Applicants	Disaster Housing	Individual & Family Grants	Small Business Administration Loans	TOTAL
1993	4,277	\$8,359,550	\$5,818,167	\$11,898,600	\$26,076,317
1995	333	\$204,493	\$11,601	\$67,000	\$283,094

USING THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is written specifically for local communities looking for ways to minimize the impact of future disasters. The handbook is a “how to” guide to lead you through one specific hazard mitigation alternative known as property acquisition (also referred to as “buyout”).

A wall poster accompanies the handbook and uses icons to present major steps of property acquisition “at a glance.” The icons on the poster appear in the margin of the handbook, where that step is explained in detail.

The handbook comprises four parts, each of which explains the four phases of the property acquisition process, and a Glossary, List of Acronyms, and two-part Toolkit.

The four phases are:

- ❑ **Phase I — To Buy or Not to Buy.** Phase I is the decision-making phase, which empowers you to make an informed decision whether or not property acquisition is an appropriate mitigation alternative for your community.
- ❑ **Phase II — Application.** Phase II leads you through applying for FEMA funds and getting your community ready to administer those funds should your application be approved.
- ❑ **Phase III — Implementation.** Phase III leads you through the actual acquisition of property and administration of FEMA funds.
- ❑ **Phase IV — Open Space Management.** Phase IV helps you plan how to use the property you acquire as open space, as required by law, and manage it for the long term.

The Glossary and List of Acronyms contain the meanings of words, terms, and acronyms you may see and hear as you proceed through the process.

The Toolkit contains tools that help you maneuver through the process and complete activities. The Toolkit is divided into two parts:

- ❑ **Checklists, samples, examples, etc.** These tools are designed to provide information succinctly and simply, illustrate a point, or ease your workload. They are numbered sequentially, according to the phase where they are first mentioned (e.g., Tool I-1, Tool II-1, etc.), and referenced in the margin. The tools are separately bound.
- ❑ **Reproducible forms.** These tools are templates you may use “as is” or customize to your State’s or community’s specifications. They also are numbered sequentially, according to the phase where they are first mentioned (e.g., Form I-1, Form II-1, etc.), and referenced in the margin. Both unbound paper and disk copies are provided. (Reproducible forms have been developed using Microsoft Word 97 software.)

If you have any questions or require technical assistance as you use this handbook, contact your State Hazard Mitigation Officer (SHMO).

A Word of Caution

Always use any forms your State provides to you. Use forms provided in this handbook only if your State has *not* provided a similar form or other instructions for providing data.

