

FEMA Region 3 First in Country to Digitize All Flood Maps

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PHILADELPHIA - Last week, with the adoption of a new, digital flood map in Lackawanna County, Pa., FEMA Region 3 will become the first in the country to have wall-to-wall coverage in digital maps – a big step forward in ensuring the safety of local communities from flooding.

Just days after Tropical Storm Isaias poured through the mid-Atlantic, dropping several inches of rain, the importance of effectively communicating flood risk cannot be underestimated. FEMA Region 3, which includes Delaware, Washington, D.C., Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia, leads the country in providing up-to-date flood hazard information to local communities.

“While we are proud to be the first FEMA region with digital flood maps for all of our communities, the most important thing is that we use this information to make our communities safer,” said MaryAnn Tierney, FEMA Region 3 regional administrator. “The value in having digital flood maps is that it makes vital information easily accessible to everyone. Residents, local officials and state emergency managers can use these flood maps to make critical decisions that protect their communities and families.”

Currently, digital flood data covers over 90 percent of the U.S. population and is easily searchable via the [National Flood Hazard Layer](#). Using this data, communities can prioritize mitigation actions and property owners can take steps to protect their homes and businesses.

The digitization of flood maps is just one step in a long history of flood mapping in the U.S. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) first started publishing flood-inundation maps in 1959. When Congress established the National Flood Insurance Program in 1968 to help property owners recover from devastating floods, flood insurance rate maps (FIRMs) became necessary to determine insurance rates. In 2003, FEMA began a map modernization effort which kick-started the conversion to digital maps. Since 2009, FEMA has focused not just on



mapping, but on the full cycle of risk communication with its Risk MAP program which emphasizes Mapping, Assessment and Planning.

The new Lackawanna County FIRM will replace paper flood maps made with data dating to the 1970s. In a county that has a long history of flooding, including severe damage from hurricanes Diane, Agnes and Gloria, and over 20 flood-related presidential disaster declarations – modern maps are critical to building resiliency to flood risk. [Listen to voices](#) from the local community about the challenges they've faced with flooding and how important it is to understand risk.

"These comprehensive digital maps will enhance our support to Region 3 communities by leveraging technology to reduce complexity, increase efficiency, and improve outcomes related to floodplain management before, during and after disasters," Tierney added.

If you have any questions, please contact FEMA Region 3 Office of External Affairs at (215) 931-5597 or at femar3newsdesk@fema.dhs.gov

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