



FEMA

OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
PARTNERS IN SHAPING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



Environmental and Historic Preservation (EHP) Fact Sheet: Property Acquisition and Structure Demolition for Open Space

Environmental resources, cultural institutions, and historic assets define communities and contribute to their well-being and unique character. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) plays a critical role in helping communities incorporate environmental stewardship and historic preservation into emergency management decisions. As disasters continue to challenge our nation and communities grapple with issues of preparedness and sustainability, FEMA offers expertise to ensure both legal compliance and informed local, State, Tribal, and national planning.

Property Acquisition and EHP Review

FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) program provides funds to States, Territories, Tribal governments, local governments, and certain nonprofit organizations for eligible hazard mitigation activities. These can include the voluntary acquisition of an at-risk structure and the underlying land and conversion to open space through demolition of the structure or its relocation to sites outside the floodplain. This fact sheet does not address EHP review for relocation projects. The acquired property must be deed-restricted in perpetuity to open space uses that restore and conserve the natural floodplain functions. Possible uses of the land include wildlife habitat, active-use parks, or multi-use greenways.

Typically, these activities have only minor impacts on the natural environment. However, in certain instances, the potential presence of hazardous materials on a proposed acquisition site may result in negative health and socio-economic impacts on the adjacent community. More commonly, these projects have significant potential to adversely affect historic properties. For example, purchased buildings may be individually eligible for—or listed in—the National Register of Historic Places, or they may be located in a historic district where their removal will create an undesirable, “checkerboard” effect. Before grant funding can be approved, FEMA must review projects to ensure that they meet all Federal and State environmental laws and regulations.

Considering EHP Impacts

FEMA carefully reviews each action to identify the potential impacts of acquisition projects on the environment. EHP specialists may work with the applicant or grant program to provide guidance that will help applicants anticipate and address potential EHP issues so they are better positioned to satisfy requirements and more quickly secure FEMA grant funding. While acquisition/demolition projects are most likely to impact historic properties, State and local governments must also consider Federal, State, and local laws that relate to their projects' effects on floodplains, wetlands, endangered and threatened species, critical wildlife habitats, soils, prime farmland, water and air quality, low-income and minority populations, and other resources.

EHP Considerations for Acquisitions

When planning an acquisition of a hazard prone structure, FEMA advises communities to:

- Ensure that no physical actions occur before historic buildings and archaeological resources are identified and environmental compliance review is complete.
- Take steps to ensure that all properties are free of hazardous materials at the time of acquisition. For residential properties, this generally means lead, asbestos, and fuel tanks. Acquisition of commercial and multi-resident properties may require more in-depth evaluation and site remediation.
- Determine if there are direct and immediate physical impacts to a site due to modification of land for open space. If so, these actions must be evaluated for environmental impacts as part of the scope of the project.

Property Acquisition and Demolition: Grant Application EHP Checklist

The checklist below describes project information that FEMA requires in order to complete EHP review of a property acquisition and demolition project.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Location	State the location of the project, including both the site address and latitude/longitude in decimal degrees (e.g., 38.5342° N, -77.0212° W). Provide any maps (including the Flood Insurance Rate Map) with project site marked clearly, aerial imagery, or drawings showing the location of the properties to be acquired.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Description of Project Scope of Work	Provide a scope of work for the project, including plans for demolition, level of ground disturbance, extent of vegetation removal, and grading plans. The information needs to be sufficient to provide a clear picture of the scope of the action being reviewed.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Age of Existing Buildings	Provide the date of construction for any buildings or structures located on the site(s) to be acquired.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Photographs	Provide clear, color photographs of each of the buildings to be acquired, including one photo for each side of the building. Also include color photographs of the surrounding neighborhood taken from the acquisition site. Clearly label photographs with the location and orientation of the camera relative to the property to be acquired.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agency Coordination	Coordinate with applicable resource agencies prior to submitting your application to FEMA. Note communications with Federal, State, and local resource agencies (i.e., the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). Provide copies of correspondence and permits.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Additional Information	Include copies of other relevant information, such as environmental site assessments and remediation reports, historic property designations or surveys, or archaeological surveys.

Timeframes for EHP Review

Timeframes for EHP review vary depending on a project's potential to impact environmental and historic resources and the complexity of the proposed project. For projects that do not affect historic properties, the review process generally takes 30 days after FEMA has received a complete project application with supporting documentation. If FEMA determines that the demolition of a building will have an adverse effect on historic properties, FEMA is required to consult with the State and/or Tribal Historic Preservation Office(s), the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and other interested parties to develop a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in order to resolve adverse effects under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Development of this MOA will extend the review period a minimum of 30 to 60 days as it involves coordination with other agencies and stakeholders.

EHP Best Practice: Des Moines, Iowa, Residential Property Demolition

In 2011, the City of Des Moines, IA, applied for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding to acquire and demolish 61 residential properties located in the floodplain. The grant also included acquisition of 38 vacant lots located adjacent to these properties. The City provided clearly marked property photographs, aerial imagery, and assurance of hazardous materials testing and disposal as part of the application. The City also included the SHPO consultation letter that had been provided by the FEMA Regional Environmental Officer, documenting that none of the properties were eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and that no archaeological survey was required in advance of each acquisition and demolition. This comprehensive application package allowed FEMA to complete the review quickly, thus allowing for timely funding and implementation of the project. The properties were acquired and the structures demolished, returning the floodplain to its natural function.

Additional Resources: For more information on EHP review and FEMA grant assistance, contact your State Emergency Management Agency or Tribal office or visit <http://www.fema.gov/environmental-planning-and-historic-preservation-program>.