

Region VI

Helping Property Owners Make Informed Rebuilding Decisions



RiskMAP
Increasing Resilience Together

THE CHALLENGE

In May 2015, more than 35 trillion gallons of water fell in Texas, according to the National Weather Service. This led to widespread damages across the State, including in the Guadalupe-Blanco River Basin, where the Blanco River in Wimberley rose to the highest recorded levels ever. Many homes and businesses in Hays, Guadalupe, and Caldwell Counties were damaged or destroyed, and locally developed flood study results revealed significant increases in flood water-surface elevations, compared to the effective Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs).

After the flooding, property owners were faced with repairing or rebuilding damaged structures, and FEMA's Regional office needed to provide new flood risk data quickly to inform construction plans.



Wimberley, TX — The Blanco River scattered with debris after storms impacted the area.
Image: Andrea Booher/FEMA

THE SOLUTION

Prior to the floods, FEMA Region 6 had been working with the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the State of Texas to update the flood maps for the Guadalupe River Basin. In coordination with a number of local communities, the GBRA had prepared updated studies for the Blanco, Guadalupe, and San Marcos Rivers throughout Caldwell, Guadalupe, and Hays Counties.

To support recovery, as well as local reconstruction and permitting efforts, FEMA used the updated flood study analysis to rapidly produce flood recovery data, including Advisory Base Flood Elevations (ABFEs) for Caldwell, Hays, and Guadalupe Counties. This new ABFE data provided homeowners with an updated analysis of the 1-percent-annual-chance flood hazard elevations in their area. It also allowed local communities to understand where their flood risk had increased since the effective FIRM was issued. For some of these jurisdictions, the effective FIRM dated as far back as 2005.

Using this data, FEMA created an online tool (<http://apps.femadata.com/RebuildTXmap/>) to help local officials and property owners identify the specific flood risk for their home or business. This tool allows users to locate their property on a map and then generates a side-by-side comparison of the current FIRM and a map based on the new ABFE data. Property owners were able to see how the flood risk had changed, providing a powerful visualization about the importance of mitigation actions. The tool also simplified the permitting process for local officials helping residents rebuild after the disaster.

Several members of the Community Engagement and Risk Communication (CERC) team assisted Region 6 staff at the Austin Joint Field Office (JFO) to support communities during the recovery phase. This group was able to collaborate and develop communication strategies that were ultimately incorporated into fact sheets to help property owners use the new data to rebuild more effectively.

THE OUTCOME

The first round of ABFE data, released to the public on August 21, 2015, provided property owners with critical information to inform their recovery and rebuilding efforts.

FEMA Region 6 and Joint Field Office staff, along with State and local officials, held three Flood Risk Open Houses and Flood Insurance Workshops in Wimberley and San Marcos. At each public event, property owners were able to access the ABFE information on RiskMAP6.com, using tools and resources that taught them about the new flood risk data.

News outlets, including the Austin American Statesman, the Associated Press, local broadcast channels KXAN-TV and KVUE-TV, local radio, and the industry trade publication Insurance Journal all helped to raise public awareness and understanding about the release of new ABFE data in central Texas.

[Diane Howe, FEMA Region 6 Risk MAP Lead] said, “FEMA was already working with the State and the GBRA to collect data to inform mapping efforts before the flood. The hope is that communities will use the flood recovery data to inform rebuilding. Many in Wimberley, like Bob [Flocke, Wimberley resident], are happy FEMA is taking those precautions.

— Fox 7 Austin, August 22, 2015

THE BENEFIT

FEMA Region 6 was able to communicate to property owners that choosing to build, elevate, or rebuild to at least the elevation of the Advisory BFEs could reduce the cost of their flood insurance premiums and increase their chances of lower recovery costs in the event of future storms and floods. Through the collaborative efforts of the Region, the State, and local communities to release ABFE data quickly and to communicate the increased risk effectively, property owners were able to make more informed decisions to mitigate against future risk—taking actions that contribute to a stronger, safer, more resilient community.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<http://apps.femadata.com/RebuildTXmap/>

RiskMAP6.com

- Three Open House events with several hundred attendees
- Four public webinars
- Multiple media briefings or interviews
- Seventeen print, online, and broadcast news stories
- Multiple Congressional briefings
- Multiple local official briefings
- Three webinars for insurance agents and real estate agents



Wimberley homeowner reviews flood map updates with FEMA representative.
Image: Andrea Booher/FEMA



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