



What is a Flood Map?

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) partners with states, tribes and communities through the Risk Mapping, Assessment, and Planning (Risk MAP) program to identify flood hazards, assess flood risks, and provide accurate data to guide stakeholders in taking effective mitigation actions that result in safer and more resilient communities. This data is incorporated into flood maps, known as Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs), that support the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and provide the basis for community floodplain management regulations and flood insurance requirements.

Through the Risk MAP program, flood maps are developed using the best available science and analyzed by some of the leading engineering firms in the field. The mapping standards are published, vetted, peer-reviewed, and updated continuously to ensure they are aligned with current best practices.

Process and Frequency for Updating Flood Maps

Flood hazards are dynamic and can change frequently as a result of a variety of factors, including weather patterns, erosion, and new development. Because flood risks can change over time, and water flow and drainage patterns can be altered dramatically by surface erosion, land use, and natural forces, FEMA works with communities to identify areas where such changes occur and determines the best approach for updating the flood hazard information shown on the FIRM for that area.

Flood zone designations and other flood hazard information may be established or revised when new and more accurate information becomes available because of a FEMA-funded restudy or because the community makes the information available to FEMA. Several factors influence the frequency with which FIRMs may be updated, such as the extent of new development and the completion of flood-control projects. Each FEMA-funded flood risk project and associated FIRM update is tailored to the needs and capabilities of each affected community and may involve different steps, products, and services.

When FEMA funds are not sufficient to undertake a new flood risk study, FEMA relies on scientific and technical data and documentation provided by communities to reflect changes that occur. Communities prioritize the development of the data and documentation that are required to ensure the FIRMs continue to meet FEMA's rigorous standards.

Technical Credibility of FEMA's Flood Mapping Program

Rigorous data is the backbone of flood mapping products, and the methods employed in flood risk studies and FIRM updates are scientifically and technically appropriate. Hydrologic and hydraulic studies determine ground elevations, the depth of floodwaters, the width of floodplains, the amount of water that will be carried during flood events, and obstructions to water flow.

The results of these studies are then represented on FIRMs and associated products using the best data available, in accordance with current FEMA flood hazard and mapping standards.

In 2016, the FEMA Administrator certified to Congress that the FEMA National Flood Mapping Program produces technically credible flood hazard data in areas where FIRMs are developed and updated.

When a new map is issued or an effective map is revised, the mapped flood hazard, as well as building or insurance requirements, may change. An effective map is one that has been through the public review and appeal process and has been adopted as a regulatory FIRM for floodplain management and insurance. Therefore, it is important for users to check FEMA's Map Service Center (MSC) (at <https://msc.fema.gov>) or the local community map repository for the current, effective information.

FEMA is working to implement a five-year mapping, planning, and prioritization framework that will enable the agency to prioritize future flood hazard mapping operations in a more consistent manner. This framework will facilitate gaining mapping priority-related input from federal, state, and local partners sooner and provide the partners with a more transparent view of FEMA's operational priorities.

How is a FIRM Helpful?

FIRMs are important for communicating flood hazards and risks to communities and individuals; informing the implementation of local floodplain management regulations and building standards; and providing critical information for disaster response planning, recovery, and rebuilding decisions. FIRMs support a community's ability to make informed decisions about where to plan and allow development.

Need More Information?

For additional information about flood maps and the NFIP, please visit: www.fema.gov/national-flood-insurance-program or call 1-800-427-4661.

"FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards."