



Moving Highway Shop Improves Disaster Response

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Crawford County, Wisconsin

Crawford County, WI – Before, during, and after flooding, employees of the Crawford County Highway Shop in Gays Mills, Wisconsin, spent hours and days moving vehicles, heavy equipment, and computers, and sandbagging and raising things off the ground, all in an effort to protect their facility from rising waters.



“Today things are a lot better,” said Dennis J. Pelock, Crawford County Highway Commissioner, as he looked out from his new facility on a hilltop near Seneca, Wisconsin. The new facility is located 1,231 feet above sea level, one of the highest points in the county. On September 18, 2007, exactly one month after the largest flood in Gays Mills’ history, his crews were well ahead of where they would have been had they not moved their shop.

During past floods, the old concrete block building was inaccessible for as long as a week. Phone calls from residents went unanswered, and staff was often on the wrong side of the flooding Kickapoo River from the equipment they needed. Then everything had to be dried out, cleaned up, and put back. They always lost vehicle parts.

Some of the duties Crawford County Highway Shop performs during major storms include closing roads, floodwater rescues, erecting safety devices, providing a physical presence, and building temporary dikes. Time spent protecting their equipment and shop took them away from providing these services to residents of the county.

“The floods put us out of business for a while. With the mechanic shop under water, there was no place to fix equipment,” Pelock added. “We couldn’t properly respond to public needs. We didn’t have a home base, we operated out of the car, truck, whatever.”

Following two flood events in 2000 when the Kickapoo River overflowed, and in 2001 when the Mississippi River flooded the area, Crawford County applied for and secured funds from Wisconsin Emergency Management through Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Relocating the facility was underway.

Crawford County spent an estimated \$2.7 million from various grants to fund the relocation project, which involved acquisition of the original property, demolishing and clearing the property, and rebuilding out of the floodplain. The HMGP funds of \$700,000 were used to acquire the floodplain property, demolish the original building, and move equipment and supplies to the new site. FEMA funded 75 percent of the HMGP total, and the county and state contributed the remaining 25 percent. Wisconsin Emergency Management administered the funds.

The HMGP provides grants to state and local governments for implementing long-term hazard mitigation measures. The purpose of the program is to reduce the loss of life and property, lessen the impact to local communities due to natural disasters, and enable recovery following disasters.

With fuel contaminants and chlorinated solvents in the soil underneath the original building, county officials conducted an extensive clean-up project to reduce risk of flood waters transporting contaminants to area water ways. “We were able to get the site cleaned up and closed in time as necessary before receiving any eligible grant funds,” Pelock stated.

The county was also required to do a “Farmland Impact Study” for the new property. Because the 42-acre site had been previously subdivided, zoned, and platted for development, no farmland was lost in the move.

By 2003 the county had a newly constructed Crawford County Highway Shop, centrally located near Seneca and at one of the highest points in the county.

“The central location has made it a lot easier to send equipment out to necessary areas, and it doesn’t take as long to reach different parts of the county,” said Pelock.

“The new facility is larger with bigger sign and mechanic shops and vehicle storage. We have more offices and now a large conference room which is accessible for public meetings. It gets used almost every night,” he added.

In August 2007, Gays Mills received more than 12 inches of rain, and the highest flood waters in the valley’s history did not recede for two weeks. The new shop remained high and dry while Gays Mills was inundated.

“When the 2007 rains hit, we concentrated on what we should do to respond and didn’t have to worry about what equipment was left behind and damaged,” stated Pelock.

The county had converted the old Gays Mills location site into a parking lot for the nearby community center. It is also utilized for special outdoor events. Crawford County owns and maintains the lot.

“This mitigation project has helped us perform public safety duties and serve the general public. When something happens during a storm, we can immediately respond. We don’t have to worry about the shop. We are located out of the floodplain and don’t have to worry about flooding,” said Pelock.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County (County-wide)**

FEMA Region: **Region V**

State: **Wisconsin**

County: **Crawford County**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Flooding**

Activity/Project Type: **Flood-proofing; Flood Control; Relocation**

Activity/Project Start Date: **01/2001**

Activity/Project End Date: **10/2003**

Funding Source: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP); Local Sources; State sources**

Funding Recipient: **Critical Facility - Police/Fire**

Application/Project Number: **Unknown**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$2,700,000.00 (Estimated)**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal Disaster? **Yes**

Federal Disaster #: **1332 , 06/23/2000**

Federal Disaster Year: **2000**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**

Tested By Federal Disaster #: **1719 , 08/26/2007**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Yes**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: <http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/hmgrp/index.shtm>

Reference URL 2: <http://www.floodsmart.com>

Main Points

- Employees of the Crawford County Highway Shop in Gays Mills spent hours and days moving vehicles, heavy equipment, and computers, and sandbagging and raising things off the ground, all in an effort to protect their facility from rising waters before, during, and after flooding events.
- Some of the duties Crawford County Highway Shop performs during major storms include closing roads, floodwater rescues, erecting safety devices, providing a physical presence, and building temporary dikes. Time spent protecting their equipment and shop took them away from providing these services to residents of the county.
- Following two flood events in 2000 and one in 2001, Crawford County applied for and secured funds from Wisconsin Emergency Management through HMGP of the FEMA. Relocating the facility was underway.
- Crawford County spent an estimated \$2.7 million from various grants to fund the relocation project, which involved acquisition of the original property, demolishing and clearing the property, and rebuilding out of the floodplain.
- By 2003 the county had a newly constructed Crawford County Highway Shop, centrally located near Seneca and at one of the highest points in the county.
- In August 2007 Gays Mills received more than 12 inches of rain, and the highest flood waters in the valley's history did not recede for two weeks. The new shop remained high and dry while Gays Mills was inundated.



The old Gays Mills location surrounded by floodwater



Supplies and materials were often destroyed as floodwaters filled the building



View of the new Crawford County Highway Shop from above.