



FEMA

Code Enforcement Plays Major Role in Floodplain Management

Rock Island County, IL - In a county that has a history of flooding and nearly 150,000 residents, enforcing building codes, zoning codes, floodplain ordinances, property maintenance codes, and trying to convince residents to adhere to sound building practices can be a tough job. However, it's a feat that the local Zoning and Building Director and inspectors have managed successfully by being consistent and persistent.

"Rock Island County has 13,000 parcels and 600 miles of road, and approximately 1,400 parcels are located in the floodplain," said Ray Nees, Director of Zoning and Building. "In order for floodplain management to work, the local official has to take a 'hard nose' stance."

With the Mississippi River to the north and west and the Rock River flowing through the center, the county is vulnerable to floods. In June 2008, flooding caused by severe storms resulted in a major disaster declaration for the State of Illinois, which directly impacted 25 counties. Damage in Rock Island County was minimal, partly due to Nees' floodplain management strategies.

Nees assumed the role of Zoning Investigator in 1995. To his dismay, flooding was the contributing factor for more than 85 repetitive loss properties in the county. His goal was to minimize the effects of flooding and save taxpayer dollars. The key: take mitigation measures seriously. By the middle of 2005, the number of repetitive loss properties had been cut in half despite floods reaching all time record depths. Nees estimates that without mitigation, the number of repetitive loss properties would be well over 200 today.

"Mitigation projects are probably the most effective steps somebody at the local level can take to save taxpayer dollars," said Nees. "We've done buyouts, and we've recommended elevations. At one point we had nine houses at once being elevated on Campbell's Island."

There is no preferential treatment when it comes to code enforcement. Everyone is expected to adhere to them. "We have done buyouts for insured flood victims, and we enforce the same regulations on those people who don't have insurance," said Nees.

While empathetic to flood victims' plight, Nees manages to remain steadfast in enforcing regulations. "If I allow a poor family to move back into a home that has not been cleaned and elevated, then not only am I endangering their health, I am allowing their entire family to be placed right back in harm's way. I won't be responsible for that," said Nees.

"The toughest part of a floodplain manager's job is when you've got to tell someone, whose property has been declared substantially damaged, that you [the property owner] must elevate your home or tear it down," said Nees. "Yet, you have to be tough about it and get flood victims to put themselves in a better situation."



Rock Island County, Illinois



Quick Facts

- Year: **1993**
- Sector: **Public/Private Partnership**
- Cost: **Amount Not Available**
- Primary Activity/Project: **Acquisition/Buyouts**
- Primary Funding: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**