



FEMA

City of Centralia Home Elevation Project

Centralia, WA - Approximately every five years, heavy winter rains flood as many as 600 homes and businesses. With six Federally declared flood disasters since 1975, City officials and residents knew that something had to be done.

Since the City joined the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) in the early 1980s, it has been able to minimize flood losses to structures constructed after the adoption of a local Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) and Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance. However, pre-FIRM structures were still vulnerable to flooding, as evidenced by the repetitive nature of losses in the area. The vast majority of flood related damages, almost 98 percent, have occurred to structures that were built prior to the identification of floodplains on a FIRM.

During the most recent flood event in 1996 alone, the cost to repair properties along the Chehalis River was approximately \$633,000. Properties along the Skookumchuck River, the second principal source of flooding in the City, incurred \$437,000 in damages in 1996.

In a series of public meetings held in 1996, City officials met with residents to determine the best course of action to reduce the threat of flooding in the area. Acquisition of flood-prone structures was considered, but this alternative was rejected due to its high cost. Elevation in place was chosen as the preferred alternative.

In February 1997, the City was granted approval to expend \$1.5 million in HMGP funds to elevate 48 homes that have experienced repetitive flood losses. This grant has been supplemented twice, so that the City of Centralia would be able to fund the elevation of at least 80, or approximately 17 percent, of at-risk homes.

To ensure that properties most at risk were first in line to benefit from mitigation funds, Centralia officials devised a scoring system to prioritize properties for HMGP funding. Each structure was assigned points based on several key factors, including its current elevation relative to the base flood elevation, the depth of flooding during the 1996 flood, the number of times the property has flooded, and whether the property owner carried flood insurance. The City requires that all structures be elevated to the base flood elevation plus one foot of freeboard, or to one foot above the 1996 flood level, whichever is higher.

One such resident, Karen Meuchel, wrote to the local newspaper to thank FEMA, Centralia officials, and even the construction team for helping her gain some peace of mind whenever a hard rain falls. Meuchel wrote about the experience of elevating her home: "My home never had floodwater in it until 1990. By 1996, the water level in my yard was over my head and I had no way out except by boat. Thank you so much to all of the above. What could have been a very stressful period actually turned out to be an enjoyable experience. I will still have a certain amount of frustration when we do flood again. However, I will now be able to assist other flood victims."

Considering the history of repetitive flooding in Centralia, officials have little doubt that the project will pay for itself in avoided losses in coming years.



Lewis County,
Washington



Quick Facts

Sector:

Public

Cost:

\$3,131,140.00 (Actual)

Primary Activity/Project:

Elevation, Structural

Primary Funding:

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)