



Supporting Reconstruction along the Gulf Coast
Advisory Flood Elevations

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In an effort to help communities build stronger and safer in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, FEMA reassessed base flood elevations (BFEs) along the Mississippi Gulf Coast and issued advisory flood elevations for Harrison, Jackson, and Hancock Counties. The analysis shows that coastal flood elevations depicted on the current Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) for these three counties could be 3 to 8 feet too low. The advisory flood elevations will enable State and local officials in Mississippi to make more informed decisions about rebuilding efforts until more definitive data are available.

More accurate data allows for more informed decision making

FEMA has conducted a preliminary reassessment of Mississippi's coastal flood elevations to provide State and local officials with more accurate data to guide decisions about building elevations and reconstruction in coastal areas. The new advisory flood elevations for Harrison, Jackson, and Hancock counties (see accompanying chart) are 3 to 8 feet higher than the base flood elevations depicted on the current FIRMs. In other words, the current BFEs are too low and do not reflect the true risk.

A base flood elevation (BFE) is the height, in relation to mean sea level, at which there is a 1 percent chance floodwaters could reach in a given year. The BFE is the minimum standard that many local communities use to regulate floodplain development under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Some Mississippi communities have adopted higher elevation standards than the flood levels depicted on the current FIRMs.

The FEMA analysis is based on storm surge data from Hurricane Katrina, as well as additional tide and storm data from the past 25 years. FEMA is conducting a similar analysis in Louisiana.

Table with 2 columns: County, Revised Flood Elevations in Coastal Areas. Rows include Harrison (6 to 8 feet higher), Jackson (3 to 5 feet higher), and Hancock (4 to 6 feet higher).

Local communities determine use of new data

FEMA strongly encourages States and local communities to use advisory flood elevations in making decisions about reconstruction and elevation requirements until more definitive data become available. As Hurricane Katrina demonstrated, severe storms can far exceed the 1 percent chance flood event. By adopting stricter requirements and building higher and stronger, communities can ensure a greater level of protection to homes and businesses from future severe storm events.

Nevertheless, NFIP communities are not required to use the new data. The current FIRMs representing Mississippi coastal communities will remain in effect until the flood remapping process is completed in those areas over the next couple years. That process involves a more detailed analysis of flood hazards, interaction with community officials, opportunities for public input, and an appeals procedure. Ultimately, flood maps become effective when adopted by the local community.