



Building Stronger and Safer

State and Local Mitigation Planning

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Mitigation planning is the process State, local, and tribal governments use to identify risks and vulnerabilities associated with natural disasters, and develop long-term strategies for protecting people and property in future disasters. The process results in a mitigation plan that offers a strategy for breaking the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage, and a framework for developing feasible and cost-effective mitigation projects. Under the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-390), State, local and tribal governments are required to develop a hazard mitigation plan as a condition for receiving non-emergency disaster assistance. The Act encourages involving stakeholders throughout the planning process.

Reducing risks through mitigation planning

A hazard mitigation plan is a strategy for reducing disaster losses over the long-term. The planning process is as important as the document itself because it helps jurisdictions integrate mitigation with day-to-day decision making regarding land-use planning, floodplain management, site design, and other functions. Mitigation planning includes the following elements:

- **Public involvement** – In addition to government agencies involved in incident management, floodplain management, and economic development, the planning process involves a range of stakeholders, including representatives of neighborhood groups, civic organizations, academia, environmental groups, the business community, and individual citizens. Involving stakeholders is essential to determining the most vulnerable populations and facilities in the community, and to assuring communitywide support for the plan.
- **Risk assessment** – A risk assessment is the process of identifying natural hazards and risks associated with them, including threats to public health and safety, property damage, and economic loss. The assessment answers the fundamental question, “What would happen if a natural disaster occurred?” and provides a factual basis for the mitigation activities proposed in the strategy. The assessment includes a description of the type, location, and extent of natural hazards; the jurisdiction’s vulnerability to the hazards; and the type and numbers of buildings, infrastructure, and critical facilities located in identified hazard areas.
- **Mitigation strategy** – Based on the risk assessment, State, local and tribal governments are able to develop mitigation goals and objectives, and a strategy for mitigating disaster losses. The strategy sets forth an approach for implementing activities that are cost-effective, technically feasible, and environmentally sound.

Hazard mitigation plan required to receive HMGP project grants

Local jurisdictions are required by Federal law to have a FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plan in order to receive Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) project grant funding. However, in extraordinary circumstances, mitigation funds can be awarded to communities that agree to develop a hazard mitigation plan within 12 months of receiving the project grant. Every State has a FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plan, though many local jurisdictions do not.



Mitigation examples

History shows that the physical, financial, and emotional losses caused by disasters can be significantly reduced through mitigation planning. Mitigation focuses attention and resources on solving a particular problem (such as reducing repetitive flood losses) and thereby produces successive benefits over time. Through implementation of local floodplain ordinances, for example, it is estimated that \$1.1 billion in flood damages are prevented annually.

Mitigation includes a broad range of activities designed to protect homes, schools, public buildings, and critical facilities.

Examples include the following types of projects:

- Adopting and enforcing more stringent building codes, flood-proofing requirements, seismic design standards, and wind-bracing requirements for new construction or the retrofitting of existing buildings.
- Complying with National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) floodplain management regulations, or exceeding NFIP standards and elevating structures above the Base Flood Elevation (BFE) in high-risk areas.
- Adopting stricter development regulations and zoning ordinances that steer development away from areas subject to flooding, storm surge, or coastal erosion.
- Retrofitting public buildings, schools, and critical facilities, such as police and fire stations, to withstand hurricane-strength winds or ground shaking.
- Using public funds to acquire damaged homes or businesses in flood-prone areas, demolish or relocate the structures, and use the property for open space, wetlands, or recreational uses.
- Building community shelters and “safe rooms” to help protect people in public buildings and schools in hurricane- and tornado-prone areas.

Planning tools available for government agencies

FEMA has developed a number of planning tools to help government agencies develop mitigation plans. These include how-to guides, CD ROMs, and online information about organizing a planning team, involving stakeholders, conducting risk assessments, evaluating potential mitigation measures, conducting benefit-cost analyses, and other planning issues.