

Building Stronger is Worth the Effort

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Adjuntas, Puerto Rico – Domingo Reyes Piazza is an example of someone who learned from experience the benefits of building back resilient. After Hurricane Maria damaged his sheet metal rooftop, he decided to make a few improvements. Years later, when Hurricane Fiona battered parts of Puerto Rico's south and central mountain region, his repairs stood up to the test.

With the help of FEMA, an engineer, an architect and the advice of Hazard Mitigation Specialists (HM CEO), Reyes made several repairs taking into account FEMA-approved mitigation measures and current building codes.

To mitigate against future risk, he purchased a thicker gauge metal sheet and secured each one with additional and stronger PVC tubes. He also surrounded the entire roof with a metal guard that prevented the wind from squeezing between the galvanized metal sheet panels and the wooden roof, thus preventing the two from prying apart. "Now the winds bounce off the roof ledge and can't separate the sheet metal from the wooden roof underneath," he assured.

Before settling in Puerto Rico, Reyes lived in Rockland County, New York, where he met his wife, Roxana, and worked for over two decades in the manufacturing industry. After more than 40 years in the U.S. mainland, they decided to retire in Puerto Rico. The couple settled into a beautiful wooden chalet surrounded by lush vegetation in Barrio Los Lirios, a quiet neighborhood in the municipality of Adjuntas.

"This house has all the construction specifications required for a wooden home, well-secured with anchors, all the way throughout the house," said Reyes, who was born and raised in this area. He said that during Hurricane María, "nothing happened to this home, except for the metal sheet panels, which María rolled up entirely."



However, with the added mitigation the outcome after Hurricane Fiona was different: “With Fiona, it passed the test. It wasn’t like Maria, but it was pretty strong, and we were both right here, relaxed.

Stories like these are common after an event. Many people opt to just repair to pre-disaster conditions and end up with the same problem if a similar disaster strikes again. That’s why FEMA goes to great lengths to educate people on the benefits of hazard mitigation, or simply put, building back safer, stronger and smarter.

Shortly after Hurricane Fiona, when the first Disaster Recovery Centers opened their doors, FEMA’s HM Specialists began reaching out to the public, through speaker’s bureau events, at DRCs and by visiting hardware and chain stores where survivors could have been purchasing building materials to repair their hurricane-damaged homes.

Community Education and Outreach teams visited between five and eight stores per week, helping nearly 400 people per day. More than 32,000 people who visited Home Depot, National Lumber, Ace and Walmart stores in Puerto Rico were able to talk to FEMA specialists about mitigation techniques.

As a result, between September 2022 and February 2023, over 103,500 survivors received practical advice on how to reduce risk in future disasters.

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