

CHAPTER 8 Public Information Activities

Mitigation of all natural hazards can be accomplished through effective public information activities. A successful hazard mitigation program involves both the public and private sectors. Public information activities advise property owners, renter, businesses, and local officials about hazards and ways to protect people and property. Public information includes activities such as:

- Library and website resources
- Outreach projects
- Technical assistance

Most individual property owners usually implement property protection measures, therefore, a community mitigation program should include measures to encourage and assist owners in protecting their property from flood damage and how to protect lives and property from other hazards. The challenge is to have these efforts effectively reach their intended audience. Numerous government agencies and non-profit organizations publish public information regarding hazards and hazard mitigation. These can be used for outreach purposes.

8.1 Community Newsletters/Direct Mailing

Direct mailing: research has proven that outreach projects work. One of the most effective types of outreach projects are materials mailed or distributed to everyone in the community or, in the case of floods, to floodplain property owners.

People need to be told what they can do about the hazard, so projects should include information on safety, health and property protection measures. Research has also shown that a properly run local information program is more effective than national advertising or publicity campaigns. Therefore, the outreach projects should be locally designed and tailored to meet the conditions of the local area.

News media: local newspapers can be strong allies in efforts to inform the public. A press release or story idea may be all that is needed to garner the interest of a local reporter. For example, after a tornado in another community, people and the media become interested in their own vulnerability to a possible tornado and how they should protect themselves and their property. Local radio stations and cable TV channels can also be of help especially if video of the damage is broadcast.

Library and web site: Community libraries are a good source for residents to seek information about flooding and flood protection. Maintaining and updating library resources with this information is an effective public information strategy, since most people turn to the library when they want to research a topic. In addition libraries sometimes will sponsor their own public information campaigns that might include displays, lectures and newspaper articles. It would be feasible for a municipality to arrange one of these informational campaigns on flooding.

Other projects: There are other examples of public outreach projects such as:

- School programs
- Presentations at meetings of neighborhood, civic business groups
- Displays in public buildings or shopping malls
- Signs in parks, along trails and on waterfronts that explain the natural features (such as the river) and their relation to hazards such as flooding
- Brochures available in municipal buildings and libraries
- Special meetings such as floodproofing open houses

Local implementation: Grafton City Hall sends monthly newsletters out with their utility billing. In 2013 a Disaster Committee was formed by the Grafton Alderman consisting of members of the public, Chief of Police, Mayor, maintenance department, and two Aldermen. The committee meets on a need basis and is open to the public.

In Jersey County, the County Code Administrators' office annually mails brochures to all property owners in the county and special brochures to homeowners in the floodplain. The brochures are on display in the government building and each floor along with retrofitting references, emergency supply checklists, floodproofing techniques and other hazard information. The County Code Administrator has a "Flood" tab on the county's web site with flood information and links to State and Federal web sites (FEMA, IEMA). The ESDA coordinator has brochures sponsored by the Red Cross that are available for different age groups and covers provides safety measures for fire, floods, winter storms and other hazards. The ESDA coordinator also prepares speeches on family preparedness.



CRS credit: The CRS provides up to 290 points for outreach projects on flood topics, 100 of those points are for having public information program strategy. This Plan qualifies for the strategy credit.

8.2 Technical Assistance

Hazard information: Providing map information to inquirers is an important public information activity. Many benefits stem from providing information to residents and business owners to make them aware of the potential hazards so they may take steps to avoid problems and/or reduce their exposure to flooding.

Communities can easily provide map information from FEMA's Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) and Flood Insurance Studies. They may also assist residents in submitting requests for map amendments and revisions when they are needed to show that a building is outside the mapped floodplain. In one-on-one sessions with property owners, community officials such as code enforcement staff or building inspectors can provide advice and information on identifying flood hazards at the site, correcting local drainage problems, floodproofing, dealing with contractors, and explain insurance.

Local implementation: The Jersey County Code Administrator office provides mapping service to the public, lenders, insurance agents and appraisers. Letters detailing the mapping

service are mailed annually to the businesses and a log is kept on the inquiries and on site visits. Annual brochures are also mailed to the public advertising the mapping service. The Jersey County Code Administrator is responsible for maintaining the FIRMs and mapping.

The Jersey County Health Department provides technical guidance related to septic system failure and well contamination.

Grafton and Elsay are responsible for mapping information in their communities.



CRS credit: The Community Rating System provides 140 points for providing map information to inquirers. The community must keep the maps up to date. Up to 71 points are available for providing one-on-one flood protections assistance to residents and businesses and making site visits. Both services must be publicized.

8.3 Public Information Program Strategy

The development of a public information program strategy is an approach to improve the effectiveness of the community's public information efforts. A public information program strategy involves the review of local conditions, local public information needs, and a recommended action plan of activities. A strategy should consist of the following parts, which are incorporated into this plan.

- The local hazards – discussed in Chapter 2
- The property protection measures appropriate for a specific hazard – discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5
- Hazard safety measures appropriate for the local situation as shown on page 7-13
- The public information activities currently being implemented within the communities, including those by non-government agencies – discussed in Chapter 7 Section 7.8 – 7.8.2
- Goals for the community public information programs are covered in Chapter 3
- The outreach projects that will be done in each year to reach the goals of Chapter 9's Action Plan
- The process that will be followed to monitor and evaluate the projects is in Chapter 10

8.4 Public Information Summary

The Hazard Mitigation committee discussed several topics to focus on potential public information. The committee also evaluated ways of distributing public information and materials. Based on the questionnaires that was distributed to the public and the response, the committee came to these conclusions and recommendations:

1. The following topics should be covered in public information activities.
 - How the area is exposed to natural hazards

- What people should do to protect themselves and their health
 - What people can do to protect their property
 - What government agencies are doing and how they can help
2. Sample articles, with illustrations, on these topics should be prepared and distributed to all interested parties, such as public information offices, webmasters, permit offices, reception desks, and neighborhood organizations.
 3. The following media should be used to convey these messages. They are listed in priority order as recommended by the Mitigation Planning Committee.
 - Articles in newsletters and mass mailings
 - Websites
 - Newspaper articles
 - Educational programs in schools
 - Library references
 - Handouts, protection guides
 - Technical advice and visits by staff
 4. Each County office and municipality should review their current public information activities and incorporate the messages in them, where appropriate.
 5. The County should provide an order form for local libraries to order free state and federal hazard mitigation publications.
 6. Community websites should include information and links to other sites to cover as many topics as possible. It should also include a system for users to determine the flood hazard for their properties.
 7. Jersey County community leaders develop and implement a comprehensive program of public information and education with regard to hazard mitigation.

Flood Safety

- Do not walk through flowing water. Drowning is the number one cause of flood deaths. Currents can be deceptive; six inches of moving water can knock you off your feet. Use a pole or stick to ensure that the ground is still there before you go through an area where the water is not flowing.
- Do not drive through a flooded area. More people drown in their cars than anywhere else. Don't drive around road barriers; the road or bridge may be washed out.
- Stay away from power lines and electrical wires. The number two flood killer after drowning is electrocution. Electrical current can travel through water. Report downed power lines to the Police or Sheriff by calling 911.
- Look out for animals that have been flooded out of their homes and who may seek shelter in yours. Use a pole or stick to poke and turn things over and scare away small animals.
- Look before you step. After a flood, the ground and floors are covered with debris including broken bottles and nails. Floors and stairs that have been covered with mud can be very slippery.
- Be alert for gas leaks. Use a flashlight to inspect for damage. Don't smoke or use candles, lanterns, or open flames unless you know the gas has been turned off and the area has been ventilated.
- Carbon monoxide exhaust kills. Use a generator or other gasoline-powered machine outdoors. The same goes for camping stoves. Charcoal fumes are especially deadly -- cook with charcoal outdoors.
- Clean everything that got wet. Flood waters have picked up sewage and chemicals from roads, farms, factories, and storage buildings. Spoiled food, flooded cosmetics, and medicine can be health hazards. When in doubt, throw them out.
- Take good care of yourself. Recovering from a flood is a big job. It is tough on both the body and the spirit and the effects a disaster has on you and your family may last a long time.

8.5 References

www.jerseycountyillinois.us

Are You Ready? A Guide to Citizen Preparedness, FEMA 2002

CRS Coordinator's Manual 2013

www.jerseyville-il.us

www.city-data.com/city/grafon-Illinois.html

www.elsah.org/

www.jerseyvillelibrary.org/