



Hazard Planning Successfully Shapes Growing Communities

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

State-wide, Florida



Belle Glade, FL — Florida recorded four of the top five costliest American hurricanes of the century after Hurricanes Andrew, Charley, Ivan and Wilma struck the peninsula. Over the years the state took action to better protect its residents and establish innovative programs to help communities and businesses reduce their risk of damage during future disasters. The programs included the development of an enhanced, unified, statewide building code and an emphasis on integrating community development and disaster plans on the local level to elevate the priority of disaster resistance measures in the planning and budgeting process.

“The goal of this initiative is to protect Florida’s communities by recognizing hazards as future development and redevelopment are planned so that these risks can be taken into account,” said former Department of Community Affairs Secretary Thaddeus Cohen. “This way, local decision makers can make informed choices when planning for the future.”

The state offered statewide workshops to show how effective hazard planning at the local level can reduce a community’s vulnerability. Florida’s four planning mechanisms address reducing hazard vulnerability: The Comprehensive Plan, The Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS), The Post-Disaster Redevelopment Plan and the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan. Blending these plans encourages communities to make the right choices as they develop policies, ordinances and plans to create sustainable growth scenarios.

A key part of the effort begins with each government’s Local Comprehensive Plan, a guide for land development and capital facilities planning. The plan establishes long-range policy for day-to-day land-use decisions and provides guidance about potential hazards. Using the guidance, communities can direct residential and commercial growth to areas of reduced risk. For example, one Florida community supported locating a development concentrating on water recreation to an area of frequent flooding, thereby reducing residential damage potential.

Federal and state laws require communities to effectively implement a Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) as another way to reduce their vulnerability to disasters. Florida counties invited representatives from public and private entities within each community to develop a county-wide LMS and to define projects that reduce an area’s disaster risks. Florida counties and municipalities must adopt and file a FEMA-approved LMS with the state to be eligible for certain state and federal funding sources.

Two additional disaster plans identify hazard risks and describe how a community responds during and after a disaster. The Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan concentrates on evacuation strategies, sheltering disaster victims and other ways to protect the health and safety of the public. The Post-Disaster Redevelopment Plan identifies what should happen during the process of recovery and reconstruction.

“Communities can greatly reduce the damage caused during disasters when they integrate elements of all four plans, which was the goal of a pilot project in Palm Beach County,” said State Planning Administrator for the Florida Department of Community Affairs Tracy Suber.

Representatives from the Glades communities of Pahokee, Belle Glade and South Bay met with a contracted planning firm and state staff to review disaster plans and projects. The partners also toured the region to better grasp its greatest challenges and to highlight hazard-reduction projects.

In addition to flood and wind risks, the tour revealed the importance of the area’s land subsidence issue. Originally settled on swampland, the communities drained the area for agricultural use because of rich “muck” soils. The soil increases the risk for naturally occurring subsidence, or settling, of the lands. Because the region sinks more than one half-inch every year, building foundations are at risk. To counteract the effects of settling, builders borrowed a technique typically used to resist flooding: elevation. Contractors drove poles through the muck soil and into the limestone bedrock below, and then built foundations on the posts. Identifying the soil composition in the comprehensive plan’s land-use maps assisted the Glades communities as they established growth and hazard mitigation strategies.

The state-funded pilot project also recognized hazards in potential growth and redevelopment areas. Communities could avoid building homes and businesses in risk-prone areas to reduce future damage to property and public facilities. For example, local leaders could change the land-use designation of a flood-prone area from high-density residential/commercial to recreational and open space.

“We can build safer communities through better integration of natural hazard considerations, by planning how to reduce risk to infrastructure or buildings, and by including mitigation policies in the Local Comprehensive Plan,” said Suber.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **State-wide**

FEMA Region: **Region IV**

State: **Florida**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Hurricane/Tropical Storm**

Activity/Project Type: **Mitigation Planning/Disaster Resistant Universities**

Activity/Project Start Date: **11/2005**

Activity/Project End Date: **Ongoing**

Funding Source: **State sources**

Funding Recipient Name: **State of Florida**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$25,000.00 (Estimated)**

Non FEMA Cost:

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **No**

Value Tested By Disaster? **No**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: **<http://floridadisaster.org>**

Reference URL 2: **<http://www.fema.gov>**

Main Points

- The state offered statewide workshops to show how effective hazard planning at the local level can reduce a community's vulnerability.
- A key part of the effort begins with each government's Local Comprehensive Plan, a guide for land development and capital facilities planning. The plan establishes long-range policy for day-to-day land-use decisions and provides guidance about potential hazards.
- The state-funded pilot project also recognized hazards in potential growth and redevelopment areas. Communities could avoid building homes and businesses in risk-prone areas to reduce future damage to property and public facilities.



Belle Glade showing hazard areas



Pahoee home