



County Action + Citizen Involvement = Savings

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Sarasota County, Florida



Sarasota, FL - Since the 19th century, Sarasota County residents have regularly faced flooding caused by tropical storms, hurricanes, and heavy rains. Though agriculture defined the County's early history, further development increased water runoff and created greater flood risks for people and property.

By joining project planning with public participation, County officials decreased flooding, moderated development, and saved residents millions of dollars in flood insurance premiums. Desiree Companion, the County's Community Rating System (CRS) Coordinator and record keeper for at-risk structures said, "Currently, one in ten Sarasota County structures has a one-percent chance of flooding this year."

Realizing that continued rapid development could elevate flood risk beyond existing control measures, County planners accelerated the implementation of projects such as berms, holding ponds, and levees. In addition, they entered Sarasota County into the CRS, initiated educational outreach programs, highlighted ways for individuals to protect their property, and encouraged non-participating communities to join the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

Specific outreach efforts included television programming, speaking engagements, and the County's annual Hurricane and Flood Expo.

"Education is a major focus for us," Companion said, "and it greatly contributed to last year's 38 percent increase in NFIP participation."

The County also upgraded its website, making floodplain management topics more accessible to Internet users. Web users can obtain elevation certificate forms, view information on flood-resistant construction, and link to other pertinent websites. They can also download floodplain ordinances and Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs).

Interaction between County administration officials and the general public also extends to map upgrades that show current flood risks. Drainage Operations Manager Kirk Bagley met with residents to verify the accuracy of flood scenarios created by sophisticated computer models. While talking with residents, he asked them what happens in their neighborhoods during heavy rains.

"If their answers matched our data, we felt our information was valid," Bagley said. "If it didn't, we had to find out what we missed and research the area more."

Citizens also participate in flood prevention by adhering to building codes and floodplain ordinances, according to Code Enforcement Officer Martin Duran.

"We inspect projects often and remind contractors when they repair or improve a structure beyond 50 percent of its current market value, they must fulfill all current building codes and flood-ordinance standards," Duran said.

Together, progressive floodplain management, code compliance, educational outreach, flood insurance participation, and citizen involvement transformed Sarasota County's history of flooding into a testament of accomplishment.

Countywide, the number of homes severely damaged by floods has decreased and flood insurance participation, especially in communities that participate in the CRS, has increased. These actions saved County flood insurance policyholders \$4 million in premiums since 1992. Improved citizen awareness and flood-control projects have helped the County move closer to achieving its floodplain-management goals.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region IV**

State: **Florida**

County: **Sarasota County**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public/Private Partnership**

Hazard Type: **Flooding; Hurricane/Tropical Storm**

Activity/Project Type: **Education/Outreach/Public Awareness; Flood Insurance Marketing; Floodplain Management**

Structure Type: **Wood Frame; Masonry, Reinforced**

Activity/Project Start Date: **01/1992**

Activity/Project End Date: **Ongoing**

Funding Source: **Local Sources**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**

Non FEMA Cost:

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **No**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Unknown**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Yes**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: **<http://www.scgov.net>**

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

Main Points

- By joining project planning with public participation, Sarasota County officials decreased flooding, moderated development, and saved residents millions of dollars in flood insurance premiums.
- Realizing that continued rapid development could elevate flood risk beyond existing control measures, County planners accelerated the implementation of projects such as berms, holding ponds, and levees.
- Specific outreach efforts included television programming, speaking engagements, and the County's annual Hurricane and Flood Expo.
- The County also upgraded its website, making floodplain management topics such as: elevation certificate forms, information on flood-resistant construction, and links to other pertinent websites.



Myakka River – the last natural river in Sarasota County



Risk properties along Sarasota Bay