



## The Town of East Haven Has Lifted Itself Above the Grade

### Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

#### *New Haven County, Connecticut*

**East Haven, CT** - The town of East Haven experienced flooding caused by the Farm River every winter, while summers meant flooding due to coastal storms. No matter what the season, East Haven's firefighters were constantly evacuating and rescuing residents.



East Haven is located on Long Island Sound in New Haven County. It is a suburban community with a population of approximately 28,000. East Haven's Cosey Beach is exposed to coastal flooding from hurricanes, nor'easters, and other severe storms. Inland riverine flooding originates from the Farm River.

In 1997, a community group formed an association to see what could be done for both riverine and coastal flooding. Retired firefighter Joe Maturo ran for mayor of East Haven campaigning on a platform to address flooding issues. At that time East Haven was on probation from the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) for deficiencies in enforcement of local flood management requirements. There was also the issue of repeated rescues, which placed residents and town emergency personnel in danger. Maturo was elected and began to make changes that would lift East Haven above the grade.

Mayor Maturo's first step was to ask Fire Chief and Emergency Management Director Wayne Sandford to take the lead. Sandford, now the Deputy Commissioner of the State of Connecticut Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, and Mayor Maturo began meeting with residents from the Farm River area and Cosey Beach to turn flooding concern and frustration into action items.

A prior grant of \$250,000 from the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection allowed the enlargement of an area underneath a bridge over the Farm River, which had blocked water flow during river flooding. The fates of specific homes inappropriately built in floodplains near the river were addressed. To raise awareness of the NFIP, educational fairs were held for the public at both shoreline and inland locations. Within two years, East Haven was returned to good standing in the NFIP.

In recognition of its involvement in mitigation projects and commitment of municipal staff time, East Haven was named as a Connecticut 2000 Project Impact community. Project Impact was a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) initiative to build disaster resistant communities. East Haven developed and implemented several projects with Project Impact dollars: elevation or demolishing homes, cleaning up debris along the river banks, and purchasing a shallow rescue boat intended for river use.

Coastal measures implemented included evacuation route signs, installation of shutters on residences as well as notification and preparedness information hand-delivered to coastal homes by firefighters within hours of a hurricane warning. The town continued the emphasis on the NFIP with mailings to citizens.

The most exciting initiative was an effective and efficient notification system. A reverse 911 system was combined with flood-river gauges installed along the Farm River. When the water rises in the Farm River, an alarm sounds in the 911 dispatcher's office. The notification system with the alarm automatically calls residents warning them that flooding is possible. The system increased evacuations and reduced rescues by the fire department which resulted in saving significant staff time and municipal costs.

The reward to East Haven is now measurable in pride, inches, and dollars. Mayor Maturo is one of the longest-serving mayors of East Haven and credits the flood mitigation efforts as a primary reason for his lengthy tenure. He adds that recent rains of 5 inches in less than 24 hours caused no flooding incidents along the Farm River.

East Haven's new rating as a Class 8 in the NFIP Community Rating System (CRS) means property owners receive a 10 percent discount on their flood insurance premiums with an average savings of \$77 per policy for the 1,286 residents with flood insurance. The total community savings for East Haven is nearly \$100,000.

This year at FEMA's annual New England mitigation conference, Mayor Joe Maturo accepted an award for East Haven from FEMA Region I and the State of Connecticut recognizing the town's outstanding efforts to improve the floodplain management

program. Plans are underway for a major home elevation effort along Cosey Beach in 2008 and a final bridge enlargement will soon be under construction.

The State NFIP Coordinator of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection's Flood Management Program Diane Ifkovic comments, "East Haven has made huge strides resolving flood related problems in the past ten years. The town is a real success story."

#### Activity/Project Location

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

FEMA Region: **Region I**

State: **Connecticut**

County: **New Haven County**

City/Community: **East Haven**

#### Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Flooding**

Activity/Project Type: **Warning Systems; Flood Insurance; Floodplain Management**

Activity/Project Start Date: **08/1997**

Activity/Project End Date: **Ongoing**

Funding Source: **Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM)**

Funding Recipient: **Local Government**

Funding Recipient Name: **Town of East Haven**

#### Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$1,000,000.00 (Estimated)**

Non FEMA Cost:

#### Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal  
Disaster? **Unknown**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Unknown**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Yes**

## Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: <http://www.nearhome.com>

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

## Main Points

- East Haven experienced flooding in both the winter and the summer months.
- In 1997, a community group formed an association to see what could be done for both riverine and coastal flooding.
- Mayor Joe Maturo and Fire Chief and Emergency Management Director Wayne Sandford met with residents to turn flooding concern and frustration into action items.
- A prior grant of \$250,000 from the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection allowed the enlargement of an area underneath a bridge over the Farm River which had blocked water flow during river flooding.
- East Haven developed and implemented several projects with Project Impact dollars: elevation or demolishing homes, cleaning up debris along the river banks, and purchasing a shallow rescue boat intended for river use.
- Coastal measures implemented included evacuation route signs, installation of shutters on residences as well as notification and preparedness information hand-delivered to coastal homes by firefighters within hours of a hurricane warning.
- A reverse 911 system was combined with flood-river gauges installed along the Farm River.
- Plans are underway for a major home elevation effort along Cosey Beach in 2008 and a final bridge enlargement will soon be under construction.



FEMA presents East Haven Mayor Recognition Certificate