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Georgia Training Workshops for Disaster Resilient Building Construction Practices

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SUMMARY

Georgia's Department of Community Affairs (DCA) conducted a series of comprehensive training workshops on the importance, implementation, and application of resiliency measures, as outlined in the state's [Disaster Resilient Building Code \(DRBC\) appendices](#).

DESCRIPTION

In 2011, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded the Georgia DCA a grant to identify opportunities to improve Georgia's existing building codes. The DCA assembled a task force of subject-matter experts that evaluated damages from severe storms in Georgia, starting with two declared disasters in 2008. The task force used those events to develop resiliency measures that formed the foundation of the DRBC appendices—optional construction codes that increased requirements for disaster resilient construction for jurisdictions to adopt or modify to fit their specific needs. The appendices were available for adoption starting January 1, 2013.



Morgan County Safe Room (Source: Georgia Emergency Management Public Affairs)

As part of the HUD grant activities, and in order to increase awareness and understanding of the DRBC appendices, Georgia DCA developed DRBC training workshops. Georgia DCA held the first DRBC training workshops in December 2012 in the cities of Swainsboro and Waynesboro. DCA continued to hold training workshops through December 2013. Due to grant requirements, DCA could only hold the workshops in the regions affected by the 2008 declared disasters. However, attendance at these events was open to participants from across the state.

Building Awareness of DRBC Training Workshops

DCA designed the training workshops to educate building officials on the importance and implementation of the disaster resilient construction appendices, as well as how to enforce them following adoption by the local government. DCA also designed the workshops to appeal to local officials, homebuilders, and the general public, and facilitated conversations on stakeholder concerns, application of the appendices, and resiliency practices.

The Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) and DCA also sent a series of emails to local homebuilder, engineering, and emergency management associations to promote the

appendices and workshops. Some stakeholders even provided additional resources, such as a public space, where the DCA could host their training workshops.

Importance of DRBC Training Workshops in Engaging Communities to Utilize DRBC Appendices

The DRBC workshops provided participants with a comprehensive look at the DRBC appendices and equipped them with the knowledge necessary to increase the resiliency of infrastructures in their communities. The workshops highlighted potential hazards a community may experience. For example, the presentation included a discussion of hazards during the 2008 storms—floods, tornadoes, and strong winds—and identified the damage caused to the affected communities. The DRBC Coordinator also provided a page-by-page account of the DRBC appendices to explain how the improved building codes strengthen building resiliency when faced with these specific hazards. This created a platform to discuss compliance requirements, inspections for post-disaster assessments, costs associated with recovery funding, incentives for homebuilders and buyers, and ways stakeholders could adapt the DRBC appendices to suit their needs.

Elements of DRBC Appendices Covered in the Workshops

Each GA DCA workshop reviewed the following elements of each appendix with participants:

- Overview and adoption
- Administrative provisions
- Flood-resistant construction
- High-wind resistive construction
- Storm shelters, safe rooms and best available refuge areas
- Resources and references

The training workshops equipped stakeholders with instructions on how to implement disaster resilient building practices based on the guidelines outlined in the DRBC appendices. This included information for homebuilders and contractors on how to build resilient homes if their local government had not yet ratified the DRBC appendices. In some training sessions, the DCA encountered homebuilders who were enthusiastic about voluntarily incorporating the resiliency upgrades shown in the DRBC appendices as a way to market and sell houses.

Georgia conducted 19 workshops in the communities affected by Georgia's 2008 storms, as well as conferences for building officials and inspectors. Currently, the Department is in the process of transitioning the workshop materials into a series of webinars, which will be made publicly available on the DCA website.

REFERENCES

Dee Leclair, RA, Disaster Resilient Building Construction (DRBC) Project Manager – Georgia Department of Community Affairs. Bill Towson, Architectural Consultant – Georgia Department of Community Affairs. Personal Interview. January 13, 2015

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