



Louisiana State University Promotes Building Safer, Stronger, Smarter

Baton Rouge, LA — Twenty years ago, after leveling much of south Florida, Hurricane Andrew slammed into Louisiana. Although it caused widespread destruction, the hurricane had at least one positive effect.

The 1992 disaster spurred Louisiana State University’s Agricultural Center, known as the AgCenter, to expand its outreach and education program for residents — an effort that continues to evolve even now. At that time, staffers produced consumer and contractor guides, and conducted workshops and demonstrations on home elevation.

Just three years later, after torrential rains flooded New Orleans and southeastern Louisiana, the AgCenter’s Disaster Recovery and Mitigation unit produced fact sheets, videos, and other materials with floodproofing resources, tips, and techniques. Most importantly, the unit also created mitigation task forces in 15 southeast Louisiana parishes, bringing together local floodplain administrators and planners, AgCenter Extension specialists, and representatives from nonprofit agencies to work and train as teams for the first time.

“The task forces included people who served the same geographic area, but often did not know each other,” said Pat Skinner, disaster recovery and mitigation specialist for the Louisiana State University AgCenter, Louisiana Extension Service. “Each member of each task force attended multiple training sessions as teams. Two of the trainings were joint trainings and became national events. The final gathering was the First National Floodproofing Conference, which we hosted in Baton Rouge in 1999.”

In 2004, two years after Hurricane Lili caused major damage throughout the state, the center began constructing LaHouse on the LSU campus in Baton Rouge. Completed in 2008, this model for Louisiana homes showcases best practices for building.

Hurricane Katrina in 2005 brought unprecedented, catastrophic damage to Louisiana. The hurricane destroyed or severely damaged tens of thousands of homes and businesses, resulting in an economic loss that totaled billions of dollars. Just three weeks later, Hurricane Rita slammed into the state, piling more destruction on areas already reeling from Katrina.

The magnitude of the 2005 storm season highlighted the need for Louisiana residents to learn more about mitigation during the rebuilding process.

The AgCenter immediately launched a campaign to help property owners understand their risks and the ways construction techniques can help make homes safer. It also helped the residential construction industry adjust to new building codes that were being adopted in the state.

“Build Safer, Stronger, Smarter” became the theme for the Katrina/Rita recovery campaign and the title of its signature publication, [a This](#) 247-page book ~~that~~ describes how people can reduce the risks of coastal hazards such as flooding and high winds, and add extra defenses to their homes. An accompanying brochure contains facts about the realities of living along the coast, and encourages individuals to recognize the risks they face and make wise choices about building. Additional

educational materials include a fact sheet on elevating homes, information on repairing and replacing roofs, options for repairing and replacing walls, plus a booklet titled “Your Hurricane-Resistant Louisiana House.”

The campaign, which included presentations aimed at contractors and homeowners, laid the foundation for the massive rebuilding education effort to support long-term recovery from Katrina, Rita, and future hurricanes. Its materials were consolidated into an Internet portal that pulls together information from all LSU AgCenter program areas to help individuals address multiple problems caused by hurricanes. In addition to home construction, topics include financial recovery and assistance, landscape issues, and health concerns related to floodwaters. It also features map interfaces for obtaining site-specific wind and flood risks and ground elevations, thus supporting code enforcement education.

AgCenter specialists continue to update the site, with Hurricane Isaac prompting the addition of new flood map layers into the “Rebuilding Resources” portal. “We crafted a new outreach piece on wet floodproofing that condensed the most significant parts of the 1995 ‘Wet Floodproofing’ fact sheet,” Skinner said.

The AgCenter’s efforts to find ways to educate the public have resulted in successful collaboration with several agencies and departments. The “Build Safer, Stronger, Smarter” brochures and fact sheets were funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The mitigation guide was funded by grants from FEMA, and cooperative agreements with the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources and the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program.

The interactive hazard mapping portal has received funds through the State Office of Floodplain Regulations at the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development; those funds have come from FEMA’s Map Modernization program and the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources.

“Every resource we developed with FEMA funding has contributed to the information we bring out after any flood, and each new initiative builds upon the work of past projects,” Skinner said. “We distributed the ‘Build Safer, Stronger, Smarter’ publications through our online system and physical copies following Hurricane Isaac.”

Additional information can be found on the website at www.LSUAgCenter/Rebuilding, by visiting LaHouse or by contacting the LSU AgCenter office in each parish.