

FMI Branch Launches New State NFIP Staff Orientation Workshop: "Communicate for Compliance"

When Georgia became the first of several FEMA Region IV states poised to lose key National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) staff within a few months, the Floodplain Management and Insurance Branch (FMI) rallied with a pilot orientation workshop to facilitate the transition. As a Contracted Technical Partner, the Floodplain Management Section of the Georgia Watershed Protection Branch provides critical technical assistance to both participating and potential member communities. The staff also offers guidance in floodplain management, oversees the Risk MAP (Mapping, Assessment, and Planning) program for Georgia, supervises the CAP-SSSE (Community Assistance Program – State Support Services Element) grants, conducts community assistance visits and compliance issues for the NFIP, and reviews flood damage prevention ordinances. Many of the new and transitional staff had little knowledge of NFIP programs, including changes developing from the Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012 (“BW 12”). The FMI Branch developed a comprehensive orientation workshop to address this void. The workshop infused so much understanding and cooperation, the FMI Branch decided to adopt it as a Standard Operating Procedure/Best Practice for all new Region IV NFIP state coordinators.

The New Staff Orientation Workshop design addressed four topics: 1) roles and responsibilities of NFIP State and Federal counterparts; 2) ordinance review and adoption process; 3) strategy to improve more timely ordinance adoption from participating communities receiving revised flood maps; 4) conduction of community assistance visits and objectives for NFIP compliance.

Appropriate Federal and State participation assured continuity of success. The workshop format ensured dialogue that clarified specific roles and duties of individuals, States, and FEMA. Coordination points and time frames were established. Areas of misunderstanding such as the “auto adopt” clause within ordinances were addressed with clarity. Important procedures for the Community Assistance Visits were defined which also addressed critical aspects of compliance with NFIP regulations such as record keeping, review of permitting process, and options for remedying non-compliant development.

The final agenda item included candid discussion of the complex CAP-SSSE program. This program provides funding to support critical NFIP state staffing, promotes building state capability, and allows the State to conduct activities which result in critical State oversight and proper administration of its responsibilities for the National Flood Insurance Program. The State-established standards and leadership, as well as counsel to participating communities, has a direct result on policy holders and protection of life and property.

Despite a dramatic change in critical staff, Georgia had 100 percent ordinance adoption for fiscal year 2013, and had nine communities enroll in the NFIP, as well as six new or improved Community Rating System (CRS) Class communities.