

New York Floodplain Management Team Advances Progress through Education and Collaboration

While education is an essential element of community floodplain management activities, so is relationship building. The unwavering commitment of the FEMA Region II's Sandy-focused Floodplain Management and Insurance (FMI) team gave a big boost to ten Long Island communities struggling to comply with National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) standards after Hurricane Sandy.

To help build solid relationships and increase stakeholder knowledge and confidence, FMI team members Justin Barnes and Jacqueline Chapman took on the mission of providing targeted customer support to ten storm-damaged communities striving to meet NFIP standards.

Barnes and Chapman reached out to ten communities in Nassau and Suffolk counties:

1. The Village of Amityville
2. The Village of Atlantic Beach
3. The Town of Babylon
4. The Village of Babylon
5. The Village of Cedarhurst
6. The Village of Freeport
7. The Town of Hempstead
8. The Village of Hewlett-Harbor
9. The Village of Lindenhurst
10. The Village of Patchogue

They supplied local officials with information, tools and mentoring to help align their floodplain management programs with NFIP standards. The team provided technical assistance through community visits and biweekly follow-ups, increasing collaboration between FEMA staff and community stakeholders.

Sandy occurred nearly three and a half years ago, which means that several FMI teams were deployed over that period of time. Although staffing turnover is the nature of the business, it often hindered communication with community officials and delayed improvement in NFIP compliance. Changes in personnel and differences in approach can create confusion and anxiety, which can be particularly difficult for communities that never before suffered damage of such magnitude.

Through close collaboration with the FMI team, local floodplain managers overcame previously identified program shortcomings such as missing Floodplain Development Permits, Stop Work Orders and Finished Construction Elevation Certificates. They have increased compliance by issuing permits for floodplain development and enforcing the regulations established by Title 44 Code of Federal Regulations, in addition to their own municipal ordinances. The communities also assist each other throughout the Community Assistance Visit process by sharing methodologies and discussing lessons learned. The successful collaboration between the FMI team and these Long Island communities has resulted in exceptional progress toward NFIP standard compliance.

As a result of the FMI team's efforts, the ten communities have substantially improved program activities and compliance. In November 2015, the number of compliant structures in the ten communities increased from 45

to 104 in a matter of three to four weeks, a significant upturn in a very short amount of time. The number of compliant structures currently stands at 141 out of 560 sites. The remaining locations still requiring final elevation certificates will be submitted upon completion of construction.

The ten communities now have an increased understanding of FEMA processes, with an uptick in stakeholder confidence that can be attributed to the improved communications.

Keeping lines of communication open is critical to the success of communities and floodplain administrators alike. Making an effort to meet face-to-face as often as needed is imperative to remedy insufficiencies, conduct training, learn more about NFIP's Community Rating System program and to address circumstances that may present a challenge.

For information on how to conduct Community Assistance Contacts and Community Assistance Visits, to meet the monitoring requirements for community NFIP participation, please visit www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/23575 or call 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) and reference FEMA Publication 776.

Establishing effective plans of action, maintaining biweekly correspondence and having trust in a community's ability to perform their due diligence as floodplain administrators are effective strategies for success. It is important to understand that floodplain administrators wear many hats in their respective communities. This must be taken into consideration when managing timelines and action plans.

"Relationship building goes a long way, and delivering outstanding customer service to our community stakeholders can only create a positive long-term impact for years to come," said Luis Avila, FEMA Region II's Sandy lead for Hazard Mitigation.