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News from Region X

King County Flood Safety Videos in 21 Languages

Riverine flooding is an unfortunate fact of life in many King County, Washington, communities, where there have been twelve presidentially declared flood disasters in the past two decades. And according to federal statistics, roughly one in four King County residents over the age of five speaks a language other than English at home.

As a result, the King County River and Floodplain Management team was faced with a unique challenge: how to increase awareness and understanding of flood safety and preparedness among limited English proficiency audiences in King County in a cost-effective way.

Translating print materials into multiple languages can be costly and ineffective if the individual receiving it doesn't read their native language – a common barrier in vulnerable populations, according to *Public Health – Seattle & King County*. So instead, King County, in partnership with the American Red Cross, produced flood safety videos in the top languages in the County.

The American Red Cross coordinated a dozen volunteers to come into the King County Television studio and record the scripts on camera. The volunteer narrators were often community leaders who provided culturally relevant improvements to the scripts and are now promoting the videos within their communities.

 The videos were posted on YouTube® to make them easy to view and share and to help in creating viral campaign of the information via

social media and grass roots networking. Since being posted in December 2010 the videos have received more than 4,673 views.

The 2-3 minute videos have been done in 21 languages, to date: English, Amharic, Arabic, Bosnian, Cantonese, Farsi, French, Hmong, Khmer, Laotian, Mandarin, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tigrigna, Ukrainian, Vietnamese and American Sign Language.

Project partners distributed the video links to more than 700 community, immigrant and refugee organizations, including the Community Communications Network. This represents an unprecedented level of outreach for King County's fifty-year-old flood warning program.

The project was done for a total cost of \$10,591. Direct costs of \$3,136 covered script translation and one translator. Overhead costs of \$7,455 covered 195 hours of staff time for project management, scriptwriting, video production, media outreach, web editing and community outreach. All but two videos feature a community volunteer – most from the American Red Cross Language Bank – as the narrator.

Outreach Success

A large Hmong farming community exists in the frequently flooded Snoqualmie Valley of King County. Hmong is a primarily oral language and many native speakers do not read their own language. We recruited the Hmong Program Coordinator liaison for Washington State University Extension

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King County Flood Videos (continued)

to narrate the Hmong video. He then sent the video to 90 Hmong households – with an estimated six people per household – reaching 540 people.

What makes the project unique is the high level of partnership; the low direct cost; the unprecedented level of outreach in multiple languages; and the method of using video in a social medium to reduce flood risks to people and property in King County.

To view the videos, go to www.kingcounty.gov/floodplan. To embed the YouTube® video on your community’s web page, select the video you want and click on the “share” button to copy the embeddable link. For more information on how you can use these videos in your own community, contact Saffa Bardaro, Communications Specialist, King County River and Floodplain Management Section, saffa.bardaro@kingcounty.gov.

Levee Policy Update

We know our readers are very interested in any news on the proposed change to the levee policy that was announced back in March of this year. In fact, many of our readers turn immediately to this section, hoping to see what information we have to report.

For our new readers, a little background may be helpful: FEMA Administrator

Craig Fugate announced in March that FEMA would be revising its policy related to the modeling of areas landward of non-accredited levees. This action was in response to requests from members of congress to do so. The current policy and the proposed change affect studies that include a “without levee analysis”.

Following the announcement the Levee Analysis and Mapping Project (LAMP) team was put to work to develop more precise methodologies for modeling areas landward of non-accredited levees. The Project Team is comprised of FEMA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and experts from the academic and engineering communities.

The LAMP team had several parameters with which to work. Here are a few of them:

1. Develop a revised set of *procedures* that account for several typical non-accredited levee scenarios.
2. No regulatory changes are being proposed during this process.
 - a. No changes to 44 CFR § 65.10 (accreditation standards for levees.), and
 - b. No changes to 44 CFR § 64.3 (flood zone designations).

The Project Team explored a spectrum of options, evaluated analysis and mapping

methods for multiple levee scenarios, assessed their feasibility, and solicited feedback from internal and external stakeholders.

The selected methods were then tested for effectiveness in representative case studies using a select number of theoretical situations that simulated real life examples that communities might face. Following this testing process, an Independent Scientific Body made up of recognized experts and certified professional engineers was convened by the National Institute of Building Sciences to review the methods and provide comments.

Now that all the development, the roundtable and the expert reviews have been completed, the proposed new levee policy is now going through internal review. Following the internal review, the policy will be released to the public for review and comment.

Here’s what we do know:

- The internal review process is not yet complete. When it has been completed, the next step is the public review and comment period.
- The public review and comment period will be 45 days, in order to ensure ample time for communities and stakeholders to review and comment on the policy.
- All studies that are affected by the proposed policy change have been or will be placed on hold until the new guidance is finalized. This is essentially any study that was modeled using a “without levee analysis”. All affected communities have already been notified that the studies are, or will be, placed on hold.

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Levee Policy Update *(continued)*

- When the new guidance is finalized, Region X and STARR will review all affected studies and work with the affected communities to implement the policy in the most effective manner. This will take a tremendous amount of time and resources, so STARR and Region X are preparing now for implementation.

FEMA Website for LAMP Updates

Last month, we told you about the FEMA website that has been created to keep you informed about the proposed levee policy changes. The address is www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/fhm/lv_lamp.

This site will be updated as new information becomes available, so check back often, as the public comment period is expected to begin soon.

We will continue to provide updates as the process continues.

Expanded Appeals Process

FEMA is revising its existing appeal policy to expand the due process procedures currently provided for new or modified Base Flood Elevations (BFEs)/flood depths to other new or modified flood hazard information shown on a Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM), including additions or modifications to any Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA), zone designation, or regulatory floodway. The policy change affects flood studies, Physical Map Revisions (PMRs), and Letters of Map Revision (LOMRs).

This policy will become effective on December 1, 2011. Details on the new policy were not available at the time of this publication.

We will provide a full explanation of the expanded appeals process in our December issue.

Have you tried the Region X Help Desk?

If you have questions on any topic, need project status updates, or technical assistance related to NFIP compliance, floodplain management regulations, or policy issues, the Region X Help Desk is your one-stop shop for answers. Responses are guaranteed within three business days. If there is a question or issue that requires more investigation, we will provide timely updates on the status of the request until an answer or resolution is found. Give us a try! Our email address is RegionXHelpDesk@starr-team.com.

Creative Use of Vacant Lots to Rehabilitate Neighborhoods and Reduce Hazards

PHOTO: DAVID JOSEPH | THE NEW YORK TIMES

This article was adapted from an article originally published in The Antediluvian, Ohio's Floodplain Management Newsletter, Fall 2011.

A disturbing and increasing pattern of vacant lots can be found throughout the urban landscape. In some communities, this problem can be a symptom of devastating blight caused by rising unemployment and crime, as well as volatile real estate market pressures. These problems can be further aggravated or initiated by exposure to a natural hazard, such as flooding. Of the vacant structures abandoned as a result of flood exposure, causation may be direct repetitive flood damage or indirect effects by proximity to the flooding source. Mitigating these flood-prone properties has the potential to benefit the neighborhood, as well as the individual property owners, through well-planned flood mitigation practices.

In the midst of these struggling neighborhoods, there is the potential for voluntarily mitigating the structures that

are most impacted by flooding. FEMA's hazard mitigation grant programs provide for a number of options to mitigate the flood potential of the property including acquisition/demolition, and relocation. To take advantage of the numerous vacant lots outside of the high flood risk areas, a community might consider setting up a creative program that could benefit both the high flood risk property owners and the community at-large. The initiative would essentially create the opportunity for a "land-swap" which could include relocating existing structures currently located in high flood risk areas to City-owned vacant lots in lower flood risk areas. Alternatively, the land-swap could simply be an exchange of parcel ownership and/or development rights. Both of these options reduce future flood risk to private investment and retain the tax base within the community. In addition, relocation or construction on the previously vacant lot could bring life and reinvestment into these neighborhoods, whose ongoing efforts to revitalize have not yet been realized.

Another opportunity to creatively use flood-prone vacant lots is to rehabilitate the property back into a natural floodplain state. When multiple connected properties are available, there is the opportunity to not only provide more space for flood waters, but also to

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Training Opportunities

Preparing Data for HAZUS

November 9, 10:00am (Pacific)

Online* – 1 CEC

CRS Webinars

November 14 – 10:00 am (Pacific)

November 16 – 10:00 am (Pacific)

December 13 – 8:00 am (Pacific)

December 15 – 11:00 am (Pacific)

www.crs2012.org

Letters of Map Change

November 16, 10:00am (Pacific)

Online* – 1 CEC

*To register for online courses, visit STARR's training site online (click here for the link) or email RXTraining@starr-team.com.

Vacant Lots *(continued)*

return a hydraulically connected area back into the flood water sponge that it would naturally be. Improving the soil make-up and compaction as well as re-establishing vegetative diversity can go a long way towards restoring the area's ability to store, slow, and dissipate water, which effectively reduces the extent of flooding. Restoring natural floodplain function can be accomplished through rain gardens or other low impact development techniques, daylighting culverted streams, or planting and maintaining appropriate native vegetation. Multifaceted benefits may stem from giving space to the watercourse to function naturally, thereby allowing it to live up to its potential as an amenity instead of a looming flood threat.

Optimal investment returns, from both federal mitigation and community match dollars, may be achieved through integrating hazard mitigation and open space planning into one cohesive package. Giving priority to aggregated properties, especially when they are in close proximity and/or connected to existing greenways can be an easy way

to meet multiple objectives. Coupling the acquisition with an ecological restoration project that returns the area to a primarily vegetated state with natural sorption capabilities, can greatly expand the flood damage reduction benefits for the neighborhood. In addition, reuse of these now vacant lots can help to meet neighborhood needs such as green urban parks, recreational facilities, localized stormwater remediation, or community garden initiatives. Benefits are compounded when projects can meet multiple community goals: reducing unproductive vacant lots within the City, taking citizens out of harm's way through reducing flood risk, and rejuvenating the scarred urban landscape.

For more information, contact Kimberly Bitters, CFM; Ohio DNR, DSWR, Floodplain Management Program, Kimberly.Bitters@dnr.state.oh.us.

Community Rating System Manual Change Webinars



FEMA and the Insurance Service Office (ISO) will be sponsoring a series of two-hour webinars in November and December to help community officials become familiar with the upcoming changes to the Community Rating System (CRS) Coordinator's Manual. The changes explained in the 2012 CRS Coordinator's Manual Changes document (available online at www.crs2012.org). The webinars are available to everyone at no cost, and the Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM) will provide one Continuing Education Credit (CEC) for attending. Registration is required. See "Training Opportunities" for the schedule, and visit www.crs2012.org for more information.

National Levee Database

Valuable Data is Now Online

From the NLD Website: The National Levee Database (NLD), developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), is the focal point for comprehensive information about our nation's levees. Authorized by Congress in 2007, the database contains information to facilitate and link activities, such as flood risk communication, levee system evaluation for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), levee system inspections, flood plain management, and risk assessments. The NLD continues to be a dynamic database with ongoing efforts to add levee data from federal agencies, states, and tribes.

National Levee Database Features

- Majority of levees located within the USACE Levee Program
- Reports on levees in the NLD located within your state, zip code, or address
- Various federal database resources integrated into NLD such as the National Weather Service
- Feedback link for you to provide comments on the NLD
- Contact Us tab if you need assistance or have questions

Visit the National Levee Database online at nld.usace.army.mil.

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National Geography Awareness Week and World GIS Day

Celebrate Your World with GIS on November 16

Held each year on the Wednesday of National Geographic Society's Geography Awareness Week (November 14–20), GIS Day is a global event to make people aware of geographic information system (GIS) technology and the important contributions it makes in the fields of science, technology, information, and the humanities. GIS Day events provide an opportunity for

those interested in learning about GIS to see its applications in action.

GIS is a computer-based mapping tool that takes information from a database about a location, such as streets, buildings, water features, and terrain, and turns it into visual layers. The ability to see geographic features on a map gives users a better understanding of a particular location, enabling planners, analysts, and others to make informed decisions about their communities.

There are many GIS Day events in Region X. To find an event near you, visit www.gisday.com.

Upcoming Events

Washington HAZUS User Group (HUG) Call

November 3, 9:00 am (Pacific)
www.usehazus.com

GIS Day

November 16
www.gisday.com

ASFPM National Floodproofing Conference

November 28 – December 1
Sacramento, California
www.floods.org

Do you have questions, comments, or suggestions about the Region X Newsletter?

If you have anything to share with us about the contents of this newsletter publication, or have suggestions for future articles, please email the FEMA Region X Service Center. The address is RXNewsletter@starr-team.com.