Hazard Mitigation Planning

Locally-developed, a Hazard Mitigation Plan documents and maps the existing essential Town and governmental facilities, special needs populations, areas in danger of hazards, large gathering places, utilities, and unique resources. Inventories of past disasters and potential hazards are also gathered. The Plan provides recommendations for enhancement and protection of these facilities, sites, and areas in the event of a disaster. The Plan and the process undertaken to develop the document enhances the communication and coordination among community departments and raises the awareness of the Town and the public at large of the potential and proactive measures against disasters.

Hazard Mitigation Plans are especially important for towns and cities to develop in light of new federal legislation. The (US) Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 encourages pre-natural disaster planning to mitigate losses and damages. On November 2004, any municipality in the US without a Hazard Mitigation Plan lost eligibility for disaster clean-up and recovery funding (except emergency provisions) should a disaster occur. In New Hampshire, floods and snow/ice storms account for the majority of disasters. In addition, many other grant opportunities are lost if a community does not have a FEMA-approved Hazard Mitigation Plan.

The Role of the Local Hazard Mitigation Committee

1. Provide information and recommendations to NRPC in a series of meetings.
2. Attend project meetings and present the plan to the Board of Selectmen.

Specific input includes:

- identify the past hazard events
- identify critical facilities and community assets
- determine the potential damage and risks
- brainstorm existing and potential strategies to mitigate losses
- recommend and prioritize mitigation actions

Who should participate?

- Town Administration
- Fire & Police Departments
- Emergency Management Director
- Highway Department
- Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer
- Planning Board & Board of Selectmen
- Town Historian
- Representatives of Local Businesses
- Concerned Citizens

Why Prepare a Hazard Mitigation Plan?

The Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 encourages pre-natural disaster planning to reduce property damage costs and injuries. Completion of a Hazard Mitigation Plan and participation in the National Flood Insurance Program enables a community to apply for fully funded hazard mitigation grants.

Types of Community Assets and Critical Facilities

Emergency operations centers & shelters
Emergency fuel facilities
Police stations, fire stations, and substations
Hospital/medical facility
Water sources and utilities
Power plants, substations, transmission lines
Telephone facilities, water/sewer lines, cell towers
Dams and bridges
Major highways or roadways
Highway department or public works garages
Airport
Town/city hall
Amateur radio infrastructure and networks
Religious facilities and cemeteries
Schools
Nursing homes & elderly housing
Day-care facilities
Correctional facilities
Special needs populations
Evacuation routes
Recreational facilities
Lodges (VFW, Moose, Odd Fellows, etc)
Municipal dumps, landfills, or transfer stations
Hazardous material facilities
Unique or historic cultural resources

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Mitigation Planning?

Mitigation planning is the process by which state and local governments identify policies, activities, and tools that can be used to implement mitigation actions. These actions are taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to life and property from a hazardous event. The planning process has four steps:

1. organizing resources
2. assessing risks
3. developing a mitigation plan
4. implementing the plan and monitoring progress

What do Hazard Mitigation plans include?

Hazard Mitigation Plans include the following sections:

- Community profile and reference maps
- Hazards that may impact the community
- Risk assessment posed from these hazards
- Existing & proposed mitigation strategies and resources
- Implementation schedule
- Plan update & continued public involvement
- Recommendations

The goal is to create a living document that provides critical information about the community, the potential risks it faces, its level of preparedness, and ways to reduce or eliminate loss and injury.

How often are plans updated?

Plan updates are required every five years. In the Nashua Region, Wilton and Merrimack are the first communities to have funds provided for their initial update. Each time a plan is drafted it must go through a series of steps before it is officially adopted. The plan is first checked internally to ensure that it complies with all requirements. Next, it is sent to the NH Bureau of Emergency Management (BEM) and then to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA grants a conditional approval, contingent on the town adopting the plan. The Board of Selectmen then adopts the plan and signs an adoption certification. The original signed certification is sent to FEMA along with a copy of the minutes of the adoption hearing. Finally, FEMA sends the town a letter of acceptance of the plan.

Is the public involved in the planning process?

Public participation is required as part of the plan development and updating process. Meetings with stakeholders—including FEMA field representatives, emergency management directors, road agents, firefighters, police officers, and residents—are an integral part of the process.

What mitigation activities might a community undertake as result of its plan?

Mitigation focuses on breaking the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage. Mitigation efforts provide value by creating safer communities and reducing loss of life and property. Mitigation includes activities such as:

- Complying with or exceeding National Flood Insurance Program floodplain management regulations.
- Enforcing stringent building codes, flood-proofing requirements, seismic design standards, and wind-bracing requirements for new construction or when repairing existing buildings.
- Adopting zoning ordinances that direct development away from areas subject to flooding, storm surge, or coastal erosion.
- Retrofitting public buildings to withstand hurricane-strength winds or ground shaking.
- Acquiring damaged homes or businesses in flood-prone areas, relocating the structures, and returning the property to open space, wetlands, or recreational uses.

NRPC

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