

Responses to Questions During Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan 2011 Update Public Comment Period

Question from email: James K. Schachtschneider, CivilTech Engineering, Inc.

Most of the 13 counties in H-GAC area have LiDAR (2005 or later), 2008 Land Use and Land Cover data, building inventory data (from appraisal district), essential facilities, and etc. Did H-GAC use any of these local data in your HAZUS-MH analysis?

Response:

At the time of the 2011 hazard mitigation plan planning process, the current HAZUS-MH did not include 2010 Census data. Because this new version was unavailable during the analysis portion of the planning process, the data acquired from HAZUS-MH during the 2006 planning process was left unchanged.

Question 1 from Public Hearing: Garrett Dolan, Rice University

Do the hazards identified also include hazardous facilities? For example, the Houston Ship Channel? Are these types of areas identified as well?

Response:

Hazardous facilities are covered under Toxic Release/HAZMAT hazard. A map of registered facilities in region is included in the plan update. A map is not required. FEMA and DEM do not review human-caused hazards, but communities in the region wanted the plan update to include Toxic Release/HAZMAT hazard as well as energy pipeline failure. Since majority of registered HAZMAT facilities are located in Harris County, which has its own hazard mitigation plan, no individual mitigation action items for Harris County are included in the regional hazard mitigation plan update.

Question 2 from Public Hearing: Garrett Dolan, Rice University

Why don't all counties in the region participate in the regional plan? Why do they go their own way?

Response:

Participating in a regional plan or an individual jurisdiction plan is an option. Communities choose based on the best fit for that particular community. Some jurisdictions have more capacity to conduct their own plans. There is no requirement to participate in regional plan. In some cases makes more sense for some communities to be part of a regional plan. H-GAC received a DEM grant, requiring match, to conduct the plan. Counties participating in the regional plan contributed a small amount of match and staff time. H-GAC developed the entire plan.

Question 3 from Public Hearing: Garrett Dolan, Rice University

Do different jurisdictions with their own plans come together to coordinating mitigation efforts?

Response:

There is some discussion at FEMA moving forward. There may be an effort to link some of the hazard mitigation plans to HUD-funded Regional Plan for Sustainable Development.

Question 4 from Public Hearing: Garrett Dolan, Rice University

Many of mitigation efforts are all physical, structural, capital improvement projects, but no socioeconomic projects. Is this a part of set responsibilities of the hazard mitigation plan to address things like this?

Response:

FEMA considers certain projects eligible and some not eligible. Projects are led and driven by local jurisdictions. For example, a community could revise its zoning ordinance to only allow types of structures outside of 100-year flood or surge zone. Projects are locally driven.

Question 5 from Public Hearing: James Schachtschneider, CivilTech Engineering, Inc.

Will you have any other public hearings at other locations?

Response:

No, this is the only public hearing. After approval from FEMA, the 78 local jurisdictions in the plan must adopt the plan by resolution in order to be officially considered a jurisdiction in the regional plan. Public hearings at the local level must be conducted as part of the adoption by resolution process.

Question 6 from Public Hearing: Kathleen Garland, University of Houston – Clear Lake

When it comes to putting together the plan, who drives the process?

We rely heavily on the local emergency management coordinators at county level to get the word out since there is already a system in place between them and the cities within the counties. For finding local projects, the counties and cities determine what those locally-specific mitigation actions will be. Elected officials are also often involved, particularly in more rural communities.

Question 7 from Public Hearing: Garrett Dolan, Rice University

Is it fair to say that the recommendations for the communities come from the emergency managers?

Response:

The mitigation actions for the communities are typically communicated to H-GAC through the county emergency management coordinators. There is already a system in place between the county emergency management coordinators and the cities, so the cities are accustomed to coordinating with the emergency management coordinators.

Question 8 from Public Hearing: James Schachtschneider, CivilTech Engineering, Inc.

Can you summarize the changes from the 2006 plan and the 2011 plan update?

Response:

Galveston County has conducted its own hazard mitigation plan. The 2006 plan had a large number of projects related to hurricane effects because Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit during the late draft review stage. Tsunami was included in the 2006 plan due to the southeast Asian tsunami was also part of the 2006, but is not included in the 2011 plan update. Wildfire and drought were more of a concern in the 2011 plan update since both hazards occurred during the planning process. The 2011 plan update contains more locally-specific mitigation actions related to wildfire than did the 2006 plan. H-GAC enhanced the plan update with more analysis for wildfire and drought as it contributes to wildfire. A couple communities wanted to look at human-caused hazards due to a release in their jurisdiction, but human-caused hazards are not required. An updated list of repetitive loss properties is included in the 2011 plan update. More projects that support NFIP compliance are included in the 2011 plan update. HAZUS-MH with 2010 Census data will be run in the 2016 plan update. The plan update's mitigation actions almost doubled with the addition of the new 2011 locally-specific mitigation actions. The 2011 plan update is a much stronger plan.

Question 9 from Public Hearing: Hank Hodde, University of Houston – Clear Lake

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I was concerned to hear that Galveston County dropped out of the plan and Harris County is doing its own thing. But from a regional perspective we need to join them for more of a sustainable effort. How much of plan incorporates comp planning for these local jurisdictions? Do you foresee that happening in the future?

Response:

There is no requirement to have a regional effort at this point. Communities are required to have FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plans to be eligible for pre-disaster mitigation grants and the hazard mitigation grant program funds. Grant funds tend to determine what work can be done. Incorporation into comprehensive plans would be conducted at the local level. It would depend on the community. Incorporation of the hazard mitigation plan into comprehensive plans is not a requirement. Hazard mitigation is an important concept in the regional plan for sustainable development, made possible by a grant from HUD.

Question 10 from Public Hearing: Hank Hodde, University of Houston – Clear Lake

From a watershed perspective, do you look at mitigation efforts for a downstream area?

Response:

Coordination of flood type projects is not conducted through the hazard mitigation plan. H-GAC has a Regional Flood Management Council that may be able to answer your question.

Question 11 from Public Hearing: Kathleen Garland, University of Houston – Clear Lake

How are the counties and participating communities approaching drought, in terms of the hazard mitigation plan?

Response:

In terms of funding projects, first the hazard must be identified in the plan. Next, a disaster declaration for drought must occur. If has passed a resolution adopting the plan, they are eligible to apply. If the community has a specific mitigation action addressing drought in the plan, its funding request is more competitive. If the community is in the plan, does not have a specific mitigation action addressing drought in the plan, it is still eligible to apply.

Question 12 from Public Hearing: Kathleen Garland, University of Houston – Clear Lake

Does something like having a drought contingency plan count as hazard mitigation?

Response:

Mitigation is making something stronger or less likely to be impacted again. Prevention and maintenance are not eligible. For example, public information and awareness for wildfire prevention or the activity of creating defensible space are eligible. Putting in a larger water tank is not eligible.

Question 13 from Public Hearing: Hank Hodde, University of Houston – Clear Lake

One of the cities' mitigation actions is to attend CRS workshop hosted by H-GAC. Will that workshop reflect changes in the CRS?

Response:

The workshop content hasn't been developed yet but most likely will entail the whole system and changes. The workshop will be held in 2013. Attending a workshop does not qualify as a valid mitigation action, but does count towards NFIP compliance.

Question 14 from Public Hearing: Hank Hodde, University of Houston – Clear Lake

Do any of the jurisdictions say we need help with data collection and analysis?

Response:

H-GAC would like to do more work on the dam safety, particularly verifying locations. Updating the FIRM maps is a valid mitigation action, but data analysis is not. The updating of the FIRM maps is an on-going process.

Question 15 from Public Hearing: Kathleen Garland, University of Houston – Clear Lake

I see the drought mitigation project in Montgomery County. It includes incentives. Is that a qualifying activity?

Response:

The incentives may not qualify for the funding, but definitely the outreach would. When the community applied for a grant, the information required would be much more detail than what is in the hazard mitigation action description. It's also possible that they could apply for only the outreach portion of that specific mitigation action.

Question 16 from Public Hearing: Kathleen Garland, University of Houston – Clear Lake

What kind of budget does DEM have for funding these types of projects?

Response:

The amount varies depending on the amount appropriated by Congress. The funding originates with FEMA. PDM grants are annual and small. HMGP grants are allocated after a disaster declaration. The mitigation actions are still considered mitigation after a disaster hits because they aim to reduce the losses and damages associated with future disasters. Cash match is typically required for these grant programs, and can be prohibitive for some communities. Sometimes disaster recovery funds can be used as match.

Question 17 from Public Hearing: Hank Hodde, University of Houston – Clear Lake

Was the capability assessment process easy? Is the funding based on these assessments? What role do they play in funding?

Response:

It can be difficult to get specific information at the local level and can result in repeated efforts to get information back. Response typically varies based on the capacity of the local government, given their other duties. County contacts are instrumental in retrieving this information. H-GAC gave the local jurisdictions capability assessment forms which were based on FEMA requirements. A capability assessment must be completed in order to receive funding, which is why we have this information in the plan. Local governments really see the value of the plan during the application period for funding.

Question 18 from Public Hearing: Kathleen Garland, University of Houston – Clear Lake

Is Matagorda County in the plan? How are the counties looking at coastal erosion as part of the plan?

Response:

No, Matagorda, Colorado and Wharton counties are part of the Lower Colorado River Authority plan. We do have a few projects in Brazoria and/or Surfside Beach have actions for coastal erosion. Chambers County may also have projects related to Lake Anahuac, the drinking water source.

Question 19 from Public Hearing: Hank Hodde, University of Houston – Clear Lake

For property protection, if one of the mitigation actions is to change building code standards, is it recommended that communities go with the newest standard or the next one up the line?

Response:

The building code standard would be community-specific.

Question 20 from Public Hearing: Hank Hodde, University of Houston – Clear Lake

Surfside Beach has a project to establish shoreline protection program. Does that involve continuous beach nourishment? What is involved in the shoreline protection program?

Response:

This is a completed project, so we did not require additional information to be included as a valid mitigation action.