

# Regional Mitigation Plan for Houston Galveston Area Council of Governments

## INTRODUCTION

The Houston Galveston Area Council of Government is sponsoring the development of a comprehensive Regional Mitigation Plan for the cities and counties in an eight-county area. The planning area includes: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Galveston, Liberty, Montgomery, Walker and Waller Counties and the incorporated cities within those counties.

The purpose of this planning initiative is to develop a comprehensive, Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan that meets all State and Federal requirements. The Plan will help localities maintain their eligibility for certain future Federal funding, especially the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. A FEMA-approved Mitigation Plan is also required to participate in the Emergency Management Performance Grant Program and in projects under the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program.

## THE REGIONAL MITIGATION PLAN

The plan will outline actions designed to address and reduce the impact of a full range of natural hazards facing the Houston Galveston region, including such natural hazards as floods, tornadoes and high winds, hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires and drought. Human-caused hazards will also be addressed.

For the HGAC, a multi-jurisdictional planning approach will be utilized. By having multiple jurisdictions work together on common hazards/risks, the proposed planning process will eliminate the need for each local jurisdiction to devise its own approach and prepare its own separate document. Further, this type of planning effort will result in common plan formats and loss estimation techniques that will help the State and FEMA understand area vulnerabilities and evaluate future policies and projects.

While a single, area-wide plan will be developed, please note that **each local jurisdiction will have its own separate “action plan” as part of the overall, area-wide plan.** Each local jurisdiction’s plan must be reviewed and adopted by its governing body, such as a City Council or Commissioners’ Court.

## PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT

The HGAC will provide technical support to participating jurisdictions through a consultant team headed by PBS&J. PBS&J will work with H2O Partners, Inc., a Texas based

planning firm, to provide the best possible support to HGAC and its participating jurisdictions.

The entire plan must comply with the State of Texas Planning Standards for Mitigation Action Plans (Annex P, items P-29 through P-52), issued by the State Division of Emergency Management in the Texas Department of Public Safety. It also must comply with Section 201 of Section 44 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The planning process will involve the steps listed below:

## CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT

A Capability Assessment questionnaire will be provided to local jurisdictions during the first community workshop. This workshop is designed to seek input from key stakeholders, and concerned citizens about hazards that have impacted them and to document general concerns. Using a questionnaire, the PBS&J project team will collect information about the technical, fiscal, legal, administrative and other capabilities of each jurisdiction. This questionnaire will help the project team understand development processes in each jurisdiction. It will also help guide the identification of hazard mitigation actions for each jurisdiction. Identified actions will be based on the findings of this survey, as an understanding of general capabilities will help guide the implementation of projects. Attention will be given to state, regional or local plans, regulations and development requirements. These may include, but are not limited to, local plans, zoning laws, sub-division and site-specific regulations, building codes, flood insurance programs, natural resources and conservation statutes. As required by Annex P, information will also be gathered to help evaluate the effectiveness of existing mitigation measures, policies, plans, practices and programs.

## HAZARD IDENTIFICATION

During this step, the project team will work with HGAC to compile data on natural and human-caused hazards. Information will be compiled on the occurrence of natural and human-caused hazard events in and around participating communities. Hazards that affect the area will be identified based on historical and other data. The project team will search nationally available data sources for listings of hazard events, by County, and provide a list of top hazards to local jurisdictions for review and comment.

Each local jurisdiction will review the list of hazard events and amend the list, as appropriate. Examples of hazards that may affect the planning area include: flooding, hurricanes and tropical systems, tornadoes and wind storms, hailstorms, severe winter storms, earthquakes,

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wildfires, drought, technological accidents and acts of terrorism.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

This task will involve the collection and integration of data, including an inventory of assets that may be affected by natural hazards, such as people, housing units, critical facilities, special facilities, infrastructure and lifelines, hazardous materials facilities and commercial facilities. The PBS&J project team will collect this information from national and state databases and will integrate local level data, where possible. The HGAC will act as the central data warehouse for all information collected from local jurisdictions.

Once this data is compiled, the PBS&J project team will assess potential impacts from each hazard using FEMA's Hazards U.S. (HAZUS) multi-hazard loss estimation model and other risk modeling techniques. The resulting information will provide local jurisdictions with information that outlines the full range of hazards they face and potential social impacts, damages and economic losses.

## MITIGATION STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Based on the findings of the initial information gathered during the capability assessment and the risk assessment, the PBS&J project team, working closely with counties and municipalities, will draft an overall mitigation strategy for the area. During this step, goals, objectives and actions to reduce the damage from each hazard will be identified for the planning area utilizing county-level brainstorming sessions.

During the workshop, strategies will be provided in a detailed "menu" of mitigation options to assist local jurisdictions identify appropriate actions for their communities. For each mitigation action identified by the local jurisdiction, community leaders must provide critical project information that will guide the implementation of these actions. This will include the responsibility for accomplishing the action, and an implementation schedule. These actions and critical project information, identified by key stakeholders, will be documented and integrated into the all-hazard Hazard Mitigation Action Plan.

The PBS&J project team will also present a process to maintain the plan and update it at least every five years. The project team will solicit feedback from workshop participants before drafting a proposed process for consideration by participating jurisdictions. Stakeholder feedback is critical as the local jurisdictions will be

ultimately responsible for incorporating, as appropriate, the actions outlined in the mitigation plan.

## PLAN REVIEW, ADOPTION AND APPROVAL

In accordance with Federal and State requirements, the governing bodies of each participating jurisdiction must review and approve that portion of the overall plan that affects their jurisdiction. To help accomplish this, the consultant team will provide a standardized format for documenting the local approval process and provide support, as requested, to the local jurisdiction as their governing body considers the plan.

After consolidating individual jurisdictional plans into an overall plan, the entire regional plan will be submitted to the State Division of Emergency Management for review and to FEMA Region VI in Denton, Texas for review and approval.