

BUCKS COUNTY HAZARD MITIGATION PLANNING PROCESS

A *hazard mitigation plan* is a plan that identifies actions a community can take to reduce or eliminate the loss of life and property damage that results from natural and human-caused hazards. It is a component of comprehensive planning that can help create a safe and sustainable community.

Although the plan is being developed by the County, participation and formal adoption of this multi-jurisdictional plan is still required by municipal governments within the County under the provisions of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000.

REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

- Per 44 CFR §201.6(b), the planning process shall include:
“(1) An opportunity for public comment on the plan during drafting stage and prior to plan approval...(2) Input includes neighboring communities, local and regional agencies involved in hazard mitigation activities, and agencies having authority to regulate development including businesses, academia and other private and non-profit interests....”
- Per §201.6(c)(1), the plan must document “the planning process used to develop the plan, including how it was prepared, who was involved in the process, and how the public was involved.”
- Per §201.6(c)(3)(iv), “For multi-jurisdictional plans, there must be identifiable action items specific to the jurisdiction requesting FEMA approval or credit of the plan.”

PLAN PARTICIPATION MODELS

1. **Direct:** each participating jurisdiction has direct representation on the Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee (HMPC). Because of the direct representation, the individual jurisdictions are expected to be fully engaged in the development of all aspects of the Plan.
2. **Proxy:** individual jurisdictions may authorize the Planning Commission to prepare the plan on their behalf. In essence, the Planning Commission acts as a proxy for the jurisdictions in developing the plan. The jurisdictions must formally authorize the Planning Commission to act on their behalf in developing the plan and must each formally adopt the resulting plan to clearly satisfy the participation requirements.
3. **Indirect:** for relatively large groups of jurisdictions, the jurisdictions may be divided into several sub-groups (e.g., township association, borough association). Each of the sub-groups may authorize a Representative to act on their behalf, similar to the Proxy model, and then formally adopt the plan.

Whichever model the HMPC chooses, the bottom line is that all participating jurisdictions must agree on the structure of the planning team, follow an agreed-upon schedule, and meet some minimum criteria for satisfactory participation. This criteria may include, for example, attending at least one HMPC meeting, and reviewing/commenting on the draft Hazard Mitigation Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION

The County began this process by forming a Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee, which includes staff from the following:

- Department of Emergency Services; and
- Planning Commission.

FEMA recommends that this Committee obtain official recognition (i.e., from the County Commissioners). The Committee should then periodically communicate the status of the planning process to the following stakeholders:

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN HAZARD MITIGATION PLANNING BUCKS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

- Municipalities;
- The general public;
- State hazard mitigation officer;
- Neighboring counties; and
- Other interested parties.

This communication can take a variety of forms, including:

- Meetings with municipalities (e.g., township/borough association meetings);
- Public meetings;
- Press releases to the media;
- Postings on County web site; or
- Mailings (e.g., newsletters or other informational packages).

Whatever steps are taken in the communication process, they should be documented (along with any stakeholder comments) in the Hazard Mitigation Plan. On all public correspondence, Planning Commission staff will be identified as the contact for more information regarding this process.

URS ACTION ITEMS

URS will do the following in the near future to begin this process:

- Develop invitation to join HMPC for issue by County
- Prepare initial press release to local newspaper
- Prepare posting for County web site
- Prepare example public notice for HMPC meetings for local newspaper
- Prepare letters to surrounding county EMAs

BUCKS COUNTY ACTION ITEMS

Bucks County will do the following in the near future:

- Issue invitation to townships and boroughs (and other interested parties) to join HMPC
- Issue initial press release to local newspaper, posting on County web site
- Issue public notice for next HMPC meeting to local paper, keep records of publication
- Invite PEMA, FEMA to meetings of HMPC
- Issue letters to surrounding county EMAs
- Decide on appropriate plan participation model (i.e., proxy) for the 54 municipalities, obtain authorization from townships and boroughs
- Define minimum criteria for satisfactory participation for townships and boroughs
- Maintain records of public participation efforts