



FEMA



# Local Official Survey Findings on Flood Risk

FEMA conducted a nationwide survey of local officials to baseline, then track progress toward, achieving Goal 2 of the Risk MAP Multi-Year Plan, which is to “Ensure that a measurable increase of the public’s awareness and understanding of risk management results in a measurable reduction of current and future vulnerability to flooding.” Findings from the local official survey are valid at the national level. The following are key findings.

## They Know Their Communities are at Risk

- **Local officials believe they are at risk of flooding, but their citizens do not.** Two-thirds (68%) of local officials thought their community was at risk for flooding, with 71% characterizing that risk as low to moderate. While local officials believe they are at risk of flooding, less than one-third (31%) of respondents to a related public survey believed their community was at risk of flooding.
- **They learn about flood risk from flood maps and personal experience.** Sixty-nine percent of respondents cited flood experience as a source of information about flood risk and 80% cited flood maps or data. Community planning activities were mentioned by 37% and 29% cited flood insurance purchase requirements.
- **Those aware of their flood risk take action.** Public officials who thought their community was at a risk for flooding were more likely to say their community has taken action to prevent flood risk, with 83% compared to 73% of respondents overall. They were also more likely to say that flood insurance was available (85% compared to 78% overall).

## They Have Taken Steps to Reduce Risk

- **Most local officials have taken steps to reduce their community’s flood risk.** Approximately 73% of respondents say their community has taken action to prevent or reduce flooding or flood risk. While 16% say their community had not taken action, 11% were not sure.

Survey authorized by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget: Control No 1090-0007.

## Research Objectives

To survey local public officials to:

- Determine their awareness and understanding of local flood risk
- Identify the types of flood prevention or flood risk reduction activities undertaken
- Determine if and how they share flood risk information with their citizens
- Understand how FEMA can make it easier for them to communicate about flood risk

Research findings will inform and refine Risk MAP’s National Outreach and Community Engagement Strategies and will be shared across FEMA and Federal Agencies that address common issues (e.g., US Army Corps of Engineers).

## Research Methodology

- A total of 718 online surveys were collected from local officials who would likely have awareness of issues related to flooding
- Responses collected via e-mail from July 6, 2010 to July 16, 2010
- Just under one-third of the respondents (31%) were mayors and 9% were city administrators.
- Chi-Square testing was performed between all categorical variables to determine the correlations between observed and expected results

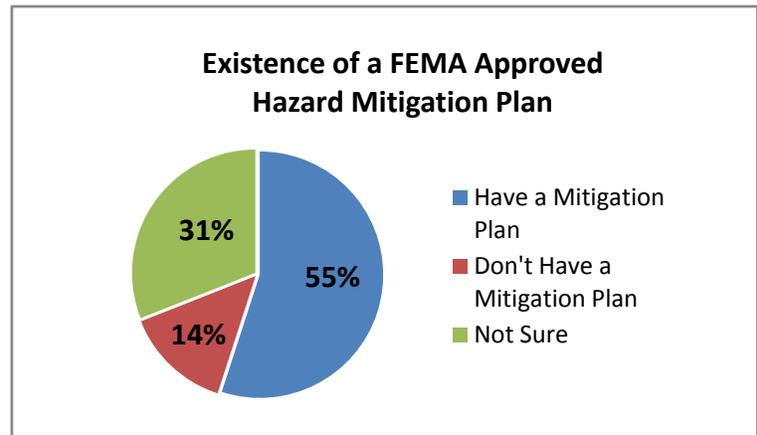
**RiskMAP**

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- **Local officials reduce flood risk or impacts through land use and property protection.** Almost all local officials (98%) mentioned that they had been taking preventative actions that influence the use and development of land, while 79% mentioned using forms of property protection.
- **Local officials conduct outreach through real estate disclosures, but citizens may not be seeing them.** About three-quarters (76%) of public officials mentioned using public education and awareness to reduce flood risk, with the most frequently cited method being real estate disclosure (27%). But 56% of citizens mentioned that they were not informed of their flood risk upon moving into a property and 9% were not sure if they were informed.<sup>1</sup>

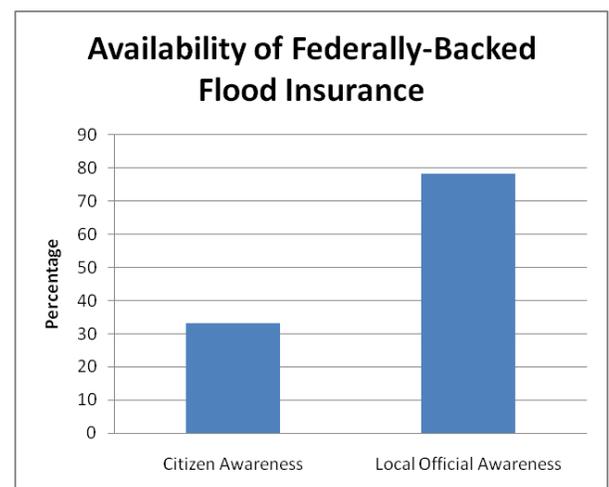
## Mitigation Plans Increase Awareness, Not Mitigation Activities

- **Half of communities have a hazard mitigation plan, and many others aren't sure.** Slightly more than half (55%) of the local officials said their community had a FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plan, while nearly one-third (31%) did not know if they did or not.
- **Those with plans believe their flood risk is high.** Those who have a FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plan characterize their flood risk as high (34% compared to 28% of respondents overall). Those with a plan are not necessarily more likely to take action.
- **Those with plans communicate about risk.** Those with plans are more likely to have at least annual communication about flood risk (46% compared to 36%).
- **Half of local officials remember their last flood mapping study.** Close to half (48%) of the respondents replied that FEMA had conducted a flood mapping study in their community since their time in office. Those who have had FEMA conduct a study were more likely to have a FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plan (65% compared to 55% of respondents overall); more likely to say Federal flood insurance was available (89% compared to 78% overall); and more likely to participate in a National Flood Insurance Program (81% compared to 68% overall).



## Many Do Not Communicate Often about Risk

- **Many local officials do not communicate often about flood risk.** Nearly one-third (32%) have not communicated with citizens about flood risk. That same proportion communicated, but only once every few years. Only 14% mentioned communicating multiple times per year about flood risk.
- **Those who communicate often about flood risk take action.** Those who communicate at least twice per year about flood risk were more likely to say their community was at flood risk (87% compared to 68% of respondents overall). They were also more likely to characterize the risk as high (44% compared to 28% overall). They were also more likely to take action to prevent flooding (95% compared to 73% overall).
- **While local officials know that flood insurance is available, the public doesn't.** Only one-third (33%) of households said that federally-backed flood insurance was available in their community<sup>1</sup>, while 78% of local public officials said that it was available.



<sup>1</sup> Risk MAP simultaneously conducted a telephone survey of 1,109 U.S. citizens.

- ***Local officials believe they or FEMA should be responsible for communicating risk.*** The mayor (48%) and emergency manager (43%) were cited most often as the public official who held the responsibility of communicating flood risk to the community, while 37% of respondents thought FEMA should hold the responsibility.
- ***Local officials prefer to post flood map update information online and in the paper.*** Web site posting (60%) and advertising in newspapers (53%) were the most common methods that would be used to let citizens know about new flood maps. Nearly one-third (33%) would use media briefings and only 11% mentioned blogs or other social media.