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Multi-Hazard Mitigation in Rhode Island

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Multi-hazard mitigation: Sustained action to reduce risk from a variety of natural disasters. Designed to protect property, human life, natural resources, and the economic health of our communities, this action has a long-term impact and continued benefits over time.

During this century, Rhode Island has suffered losses of both life and property from natural events such as hurricanes and other storms. In today's dollars, over \$1 billion of property damage was done by the hurricanes of 1938 and 1954. Now, as the coastal population increases and property values rise, we stand to lose even more. Between 1980 and 1993, insured residential and commercial coastal property in Rhode Island grew in value from \$33 billion to \$83 billion.

To address these risks, the four-year Rhode Island Hazard Mitigation Project was launched in 1994. A collaboration of the University of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Center and Rhode Island Sea Grant (CRC/Sea Grant), the R.I. Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA), and the state Hazard Mitigation Committee, the project's goal is to develop and implement plans that will reduce damage from natural disasters. Recognizing the need for action on many fronts, the project works with an array of partners, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other federal agencies, local communities, and private sector interests, such as the Insurance Institute for Property Loss Reduction.

Developing Local Strategies

Two pilot regions have been chosen—the riverine communities along the historic Blackstone River and coastal communities of South County—for the development of model local hazard mitigation strategies. A series of regional workshops have provided a forum for local building officials, emergency management officials, planners, and public works personnel within each community and from adjacent communities to work together (sometimes for the first time) to initiate local risk assessments and determine appropriate mitigation strategies. CRC/Sea Grant is currently working with two communities—Charlestown on the coast and Pawtucket on the Blackstone—to develop this work into hazard mitigation plans that can fit into municipal comprehensive plans. These plans will then become models for the rest of the state.

Creating a Statewide Hazard Mitigation Strategy

On the state level, Rhode Island's Hazard Mitigation Committee—once appointed solely to determine grant recipients—has expanded to incorporate state agencies that are formulating policy to reduce risk. The committee has begun to identify risks to state resources and properties, and to analyze existing hazard mitigation actions and policies throughout the state. The committee will soon begin to construct its hazard mitigation plan, built on the municipal plans, and on state agency and private sector initiatives.

Influencing National Policy and Program Development

The Rhode Island Hazard Mitigation Project is working with other Sea Grant programs, states, and federal agencies to exchange information and develop programs that advance community-based hazard mitigation. These efforts are accomplished by research, outreach, and education, and through integrated coastal management initiatives. Partners include FEMA Region I, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Coastal Resource Management and Coastal Services Center, and Sea Grant programs nationwide.

Building Public-Private Partnerships

The success of hazard mitigation relies on the support and development of partnerships with the private sector, particularly with the insurance, building, and banking industries. Rhode Island Sea Grant has recently begun to bring these groups together to develop private sector incentives that will encourage hazard mitigation, reducing damage and associated costs to both private and public entities in the state.

Accomplishments and Ongoing Initiatives

Local Hazard Mitigation Plans

- ✓ Conducted workshops and provided technical assistance to help South County and Blackstone Valley communities identify risks and potential mitigation strategies.
 - ✓ Collaborated with Charlestown officials to develop mitigation strategies and policy initiatives for the town.
 - ✓ Obtained federal funding for a priority mitigation project on Charlestown Beach.
 - ✓ Developed fact sheet for community awareness.
 - ✓ Prepared op-ed article for statewide and local newspapers on the need for hazard mitigation.
 - ✓ Assembled local emergency management officials to collaborate with planning, building, public works, and engineering officials to address natural hazards.
- ⇒ Complete model local hazard mitigation plan using the Charlestown example.
 - ⇒ Complete local risk identification and incorporate strategies into plans and policy initiatives in pilot regions.
 - ⇒ Create training program for local building officials to promote hazard mitigation techniques.
 - ⇒ Identify and analyze local risks with geographical information system (GIS) computer mapping techniques and develop a computer program to help implementation of mitigation actions at the local level.

State Hazard Mitigation Plans

- ✓ Developed state guidance for mitigation of hazards in harbors, to be included in state-approved harbor plans.
 - ✓ Reviewed mitigation activities of state agencies.
 - ✓ Enhanced ability of RIEMA to help local communities develop hazard mitigation strategies.
 - ✓ Expanded the state Hazard Mitigation Committee to include appropriate state agencies and local government and private industry representatives.
- ⇒ Review state's risks and vulnerabilities, analyze known risks, and prioritize actions for hazard mitigation.
 - ⇒ Develop statewide map of risks from multi-hazards.
 - ⇒ Implement new memoranda of agreement with state agencies to participate in mitigation work.
 - ⇒ Investigate alternative funding sources for mitigation.

Private Sector Partnerships

- ✓ Developed partnership with the Insurance Institute for Property Loss Reduction (IIPLR) and participated in subcommittee meetings on mitigation.
 - ✓ Organized and facilitated session for 1996 Building Officials' Code Association (BOCA) conference.
 - ✓ Collaborated with insurance and banking representatives to develop incentives.
 - ✓ Wrote op-ed for *Rhode Island Business Monthly* and local newspapers on the roles of mitigation and insurance.
 - ✓ Met with local officials and neighborhood associations to develop local pilot project.
- ⇒ Organize private sector risk reduction network.
 - ⇒ Develop incentives for property owners and businesses to implement mitigation measures.
 - ⇒ Design pilot project in Rhode Island illustrating the role of public-private partnerships.
 - ⇒ Build private sector strategies into local mitigation plans.

Regional and National Networks

- ✓ Supported FEMA Region I initiatives for community-based hazard mitigation.
 - ✓ Participated in conferences and work sessions with state and federal emergency management officials, floodplain management specialists, and other entities involved in developing strategies for hazard mitigation regionally and nationally.
- ⇒ Promote public-private partnerships, working with IIPLR and with federal and state stakeholders.
 - ⇒ Collaborate with NOAA agencies—including Sea Grant, Coastal Services Center, and Ocean and Coastal Resource Management—on national policy agenda.
 - ⇒ Incorporate private sector perspective into training for coastal managers.
 - ⇒ Promote understanding of integrated coastal management and coastal hazards.
 - ⇒ Collaborate on a paper and presentation for the National Floodplain Management Program Managers on community-based hazard mitigation initiatives.

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