

White Paper

# Seven Key Reasons You Need a Current & Rock-Solid Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP)

## There's no time like the present.

Hurricanes. Wildfires. Cyber Attacks. Workplace Violence. With these and so many other tragic events in the headlines every day, most people are left wondering “what’s next?” Yet, as an emergency planner, it’s your job to think “all-hazards” all the time, and to prepare your jurisdiction, school district or university for what may, or may never, happen. This state of readiness is best achieved by developing a Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) *before a disaster occurs*.

Read on to learn seven compelling reasons why your organization should have a current and rock-solid HMP.



# 1

## Having an HMP lessens the physical, financial and social impact of disasters.

**D**epending on your zip code, your “community” could face any number of potential hazards. These hazards, if not identified and countered, can quickly become disasters. Disasters can cause widespread loss of life, inflict major damage to buildings and critical infrastructure, and lead to major economic disruption, as in the case of 9/11. Moreover, large-scale disasters like Hurricane Katrina, the September 2013 Colorado floods, the Moore, Oklahoma tornado, and most recently, Hurricane Irma, can have long-lasting social and psychological consequences.

While the hazard mitigation planning process can be laborious, time-consuming and oftentimes costly, it is well worth the effort. A study by the Multihazard Mitigation Council shows that each dollar spent on mitigation saves communities an average of four dollars. Other studies from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and insurance giant Swiss Re indicate that the payback may be even greater than four to one.

This incredible rate of return is why FEMA has spent billions of dollars on its hazard mitigation programs over the past two decades. Moreover, the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) has found distinct ways to measure the return on investment (ROI) of preparedness in multiple studies, with definitive dollar amounts tied to these efforts.

Consider the critical importance of mitigation to help your jurisdiction, school district or university to:

- Protect public safety and prevent loss of life and injury
- Minimize the exposure to risk for first responders
- Break the cycle of disaster damage, rebuilding and repeated destruction

The benefits don't stop there. Per FEMA, mitigation activities have proven to lessen the financial impact on individuals, communities and society. Floodplain management actions alone save the country more than \$1 billion in prevented damages each year. This number, whether yours is a community of 3,000 or ten million people, is hard to ignore.



### HAZARD MITIGATION

Hazard mitigation planning helps you identify risks and vulnerabilities in advance, and develop long-term strategies for protecting people and property from future hazard events.

# 2

## Having an HMP opens the door for non-emergency disaster assistance.

**A**t a time when natural and human-caused disasters seem to be a common occurrence, it's more important than ever to identify potential hazards and mitigate vulnerabilities. It's just as crucial to do so in the most effective, yet cost-efficient manner possible, given today's limited resources and budgets. Having a FEMA-approved HMP opens the door for certain types of non-emergency disaster assistance from a variety of sources and across all levels of government.

### Federal Funding

FEMA's vision is to "serve as a catalyst that drives increased understanding and proactive action to help people in communities reduce their losses from natural hazards." To support this vision, the Agency funds three Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) grant programs. They are as follows:

- Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)
- Flood Mitigation Assistance Grant Program (FMA)
- Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program (PDM)

FEMA requires state, tribal, and local governments to develop and adopt hazard mitigation plans as a condition for receiving certain types of non-emergency disaster assistance, including funding for other mitigation projects. Such projects may include the construction of local safe rooms, the shoring up of levees, the purchase of tornado sirens, or the distribution of free weather radios to areas residents. The funding might also aid in the adoption of a community-wide emergency notification system or the installation of emergency alert beacons throughout a university's campus. The possibilities for hazard mitigation are virtually limitless, with Federal approval, of course.



### FEMA FUNDING

In 2016, FEMA funded 1,586 HMA grants to states, tribes and communities across the U.S.

### Funding to State/Local/Tribal Governments

FEMA's HMA grant programs are provided to eligible applicant states/tribes/territories that, in turn, provide sub-grants to local governments. These funds may be available following a federal disaster declaration, or as an accompaniment to a state's general funds for grant matching. Prospective sub-grant applicants should consult the official designated point of contact for their state/tribe/territory for further information regarding specific program and application requirements. A good place to start is with your State Hazard Mitigation Officer (SHMO).

Also, check with other state government agencies, such as your state forestry department, geological survey, and water resources agency, as they may offer programs to fund projects related to specific hazards. State funding for mitigation varies from state to state, but you will most likely be surprised by all the sources that are readily available.

# 3

## Having an HMP creates better community resilience.

**H**azard mitigation planning is more than an exercise in goodwill by government officials, business leaders and other involved participants. It's also more than a fundamental requirement to receive certain federal, state and local non-emergency funding. *It is an investment in your community's future safety, sustainability, and ultimately its resilience.*

Resilience, as defined by the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC), is “the ability of people, institutions, and systems to manage shocks and stressors, and build stronger, more prosperous communities.” Accordingly, a growing number of governments and organizations at every level are promoting community resilience as the best approach to managing the risk of disasters.

Those that work through the hazard mitigation planning process and implement recommended

countermeasures are better positioned to:

- Maintain community continuity and strengthen social connections
- Prevent damage to the community's unique economic, cultural, and environmental assets
- Reduce the cost of disaster response and recovery

To aid in these efforts is a complete planning guide entitled *Community Resilience Planning Guide for the Built Environment and Infrastructure Systems*, offered by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). *First published in October 2015, and updated in November 2016, this document details a six-step, integrated approach that communities can follow to achieve a more resilient, less disaster-prone future.*

Fortunately, and according to NIST, proactive-pre-disaster efforts in the U.S. are gaining momentum. FEMA concurs, recently reporting that nearly 23,000 U.S. communities – inhabited by more than 82 percent of the nation's population – now have disaster mitigation plans.

With this number steadily on the rise, resiliency across the nation should continue to improve, and the high costs associated with federal disaster relief (an estimated \$136 billion from 2011 to 2013 alone) should decline. That is, if the timing and frequency of disasters level out from the current pace and do not increase in the near term. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), 15 separate weather and climate disasters have each caused at least \$1 billion in damages in the U.S. to date (October 31, 2017) in 2017.



### HMP IN COMMUNITIES

According to FEMA, 23,000 U.S. communities—  
inhabited by 82% of the population—  
now have disaster mitigation plans.

# 4

## Having an HMP ensures stakeholders are engaged and involved.

**A**side from the obvious benefits of having an HMP, the process of creating and maintaining it can prove highly rewarding to your jurisdiction, school district or university as well. Not only does it bring members of the community together for a good and shared cause, it also creates an opportunity for dialogue where it may not otherwise exist. But, perhaps most importantly, it helps ensure stakeholders who might be acutely affected, or have a critical role when a hazard occurs, are fully engaged and actively involved in response and recovery efforts, as well as future mitigation.

FEMA believes “community engagement builds partnerships by involving stakeholders that do not commonly interact and this collaboration helps communities create synergies, share resources, and align risk reduction measures.”

To get and keep stakeholders involved in the development, updating and upholding of an HMP, consider the following activities:

- **Expand the conversation.** Encourage people with different backgrounds and from different types of public and private sector organizations to join in the mix. Their input may prove invaluable in the end.
- **Ask subject matter experts.** Seek out those who have “been there, done that,” or who are skilled at hazard mitigation planning. Also research existing publications, templates and resources for guidance.
- **Designate a leader.** Choose someone with the skills, expertise and confidence to engage people across sectors. He/she must be able to recognize and overcome obstacles .

- **Establish champion(s).** Make a point to know the key individual(s) or group(s) who will advocate for the plan and provide key contributions. Their support is crucial and will help expedite the planning process.
- **Look outside the community.** Explore your options for partnering with neighboring jurisdictions or other regions for an HMP’s development. It only stands to improve your (and others’) mitigation efforts and potentially lower your overall costs.
- **Review the plan on a regular basis.** An HMP is a living document. To remain relevant, there should be periodic evaluations to assess changing risks and priorities, make necessary revisions, and remind stakeholders of their responsibilities to the community. Doing so every 12-18 months, at a minimum, is recommended.



### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

HMP builds partnerships by involving stakeholders that do not commonly interact.

# 5

## Having an HMP supplies a strong foundation for developing other needed continuity plans.

**T**he development of an HMP requires considerable time, resources and oftentimes, money, especially if your jurisdiction, school district or university chooses to outsource the project to a qualified third party. Regardless of who does the work, the extensive details within the document provide a rock-solid foundation on which to develop other, much-needed or required continuity plans:

### **Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)**

COOP, as summarized by FEMA, is simply “the good business practice of ensuring the execution of essential functions, and a fundamental duty of public and private entities responsible be to their stakeholders.” In other words, the plan explains how an organization will perform essential operations during an emergency situation or long-term disruption.

### **Continuity of Government (COG) Plan**

COG supports the same key principles as COOP, only for all levels of government. Its mission is accomplished through succession of leadership, the pre-delegation of emergency authority, and active command and control.

### **Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)**

An EOP, which is commonly used by hospitals and universities, describes in detail how a facility will respond to and recover from all hazards. It is particularly useful in short-term recovery decision-making to reduce long-term risk to life and property.

### **Business Continuity Plan (BCP)**

A BCP provides private sector organizations a strategy for continuing operations, and ensuring personnel and assets are protected in the event of a business contingency or disruption, (e.g., a data security breach or act of workplace violence).



## A SOLID FOUNDATION

Recognizing all potential hazards and determining the proper actions to mitigate them is a crucial first step towards ensuring resilience.

# 6

## Having an HMP provides safeguards against contemporary threats.



### TIMES ARE CHANGING

An “all-hazards” approach should be taken in order to meet the challenges of today’s threats.

Like most things, hazard mitigation planning is changing with the times. The days of mitigating against only natural hazards, such as hurricanes, floods and tornadoes, are long gone, as the nation faces numerous contemporary, human-caused or technical threats. These threats, which pose significant risk to the government, the economy and the population at large, include:

- Acts of terrorism
- Cyber security breaches
- Dam failures
- HAZMAT incidents
- Pandemic influenza
- Workplace violence

Such events only reinforce the need for planners to take an “all-hazards” approach, as recommended by FEMA, when developing an HMP.

As a best practice, combine all manmade risk information with the findings for natural hazards to create a truly comprehensive picture of your community’s vulnerabilities. Also, educate everyone, especially the public, on the steps being taken to mitigate them.

# 7

## Having an HMP demonstrates commitment and casts a positive light.

**I**t's a fact. Public opinion matters, and as everyone knows, the media (traditional and social) can be brutal. Having a current and complete HMP benefits the community by increasing its awareness of hazards and risks, while demonstrating your organization's commitment to safety and resilience. As such, it can help cast a very positive light on your jurisdiction, school district or university, even in the face of criticism.

A little communication can go a long way. Always let your planning efforts, the plan's adoption and your ongoing work to keep it current be known. This simple act can help save lives, property, dollars, and potentially your own reputation in the wake of a disaster.



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### COMMUNICATION MATTERS

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## In today's world, having a Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) is essential.

The best practices outlined here are based on BOLDplanning's experience helping more than 9,300 organizations plan and prepare for critical events.

Our approach to hazard mitigation planning couples stakeholder participation and input with the use of top GIS technology. We provide on-site process facilitation, data collection and analysis, plan and grant writing, and strategy development.

The combination will help make your next planning process easier, faster and better, ultimately improving the resilience of your organization.

Contact us today to find out more.

Be prepared. Be **BOLD**.

## About BOLDplanning Inc.

BOLDplanning is the leading developer of online software for Emergency Operations Planning (EOP), Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP), Business Continuity Planning (BCP) and Hazard Mitigation.

Its comprehensive online system built specifically around the CMS Ruling walks planners through each step of the continuity and emergency planning process, becoming the central resource for your organization's training, plan development and on-going maintenance. Its support team is unrivaled in its knowledge, experience and planning certifications.

The BOLDplanning approach provides an unparalleled platform for both the public and private sector, making this important process easy and efficient. Currently, BOLDplanning is the solution of choice for more than 9,300 organizations.

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