



## **An Example of a Review of Outreach Publicity as part of a Program for Public Information**

Communities that participate in the Community Rating System of the National Flood Insurance Program are encouraged to develop and implement a public information program to inform their residents about local flood hazards and floodplain resources. Credit for such a program is provided according to the criteria described in element PPI (program for public information) in Section 332.c under Activity 330 (Outreach Projects) of the *CRS Coordinator's Manual*. A creditable program provides bonus points for outreach projects (element OP), flood response preparation projects (element FRP), and outreach projects that convey insurance messages (element CPI under Activity 370 (Flood Insurance Promotion)).

The attached pages are excerpted from *Lee County Multijurisdictional Program for Public Information about Flood Hazards and Flood Insurance Rate Maps*, a PPI-credited document prepared by a committee representing the County and six area cities along the Gulf of Mexico in southwest Florida.

These pages illustrate how, as part of the development of its public information program, a community can review the outreach efforts already underway, including the publicity that is required for receive credit for other CRS activities. The excerpt also shows how that review can result in recommendations for alternative ways of publicizing local efforts and for improving those outreach projects.

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This PPI document will assist the jurisdictions in supporting the communication objectives of these CRS activities:

**Map Information Service:** All of these projects will publicize how to get FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map information. The most common way to obtain this information is through an online look-up portal: <http://leegis.leegov.com/floodzone>. This information can be searched for any parcel in all of the jurisdictions by streets address, owner name or parcel ID numbers. The widely distributed Lee County All Hazards Guide promotes this service. In addition, all jurisdictions will provide this information by phone or in person at their offices, and several jurisdictions offer this information in writing through a FIRM letter. Information includes:

- All FIRM panel information,
- Flood zone and BFE, floodway or COBRA/OPA zone,
- Coastal High Hazard Area, Coastal Building Zone, Windspeed Building Risk Category,
- Evacuation Zone,
- Watershed ID and related issues,
- Grade elevation and issues related to the difference between grade and BFE.

**Outreach Projects:** This document implements both the Program for Public information and the Flood Response Preparation package under this activity. On behalf of all of the jurisdictions, the Lee County Emergency Operations Center and the Lee County PIO are responsible for flood response preparation and for communication during and after a storm. This pre-packaged information includes select messages from the PPI. For the convenience of the Community Rating System reviewers, Appendix C summarizes the PPI messages in the format of the CRS scoring chart.

**Hazard Disclosure:** The PPI includes an annual email to real estate agents with messages that communicate the select CRS topics. It includes a copy of Lee County All Hazards Guide with the recommendation that they share it with their clients. That guide is loaded with information about how someone can learn the flood zone, map flood and other flood hazard details for any parcel in all of the jurisdictions. It also includes information about how their clients can contact the jurisdictions for site visits or other information. In addition, the State of Florida requires that flood zone and flood information is part of sale closing documentation.

**Flood Protection Information:** All PPI outreach projects include each jurisdiction's web site as an important conduit of information in the PPI. The jurisdictions will agree to a checklist of information to be placed on each jurisdiction's floodplain management home page. This same checklist would be offered to media and other partners. And, the jurisdictions are encouraged to embrace these website references in other outreach projects as well. The check list would include:

- The seven committee-selected communication topics and messages;
- Information about flood warning systems, flood hazard and evacuation maps, and links to flood safety precautions, and shelter locations, including special-needs shelters;
- Links to:
  - Additional flood hazard and flood insurance information, especially those topics for which the jurisdiction claims CRS credit;
  - FEMA's FloodSmart website;
  - Emergency operations centers;

- Elevation Certificate look-up;
- Rain gages.

**Flood Protection Assistance:** Jurisdiction staff provides one-on-one advice to anyone interested in protecting their building from flood damage. Some of these can be inexpensive, such as retrofitting an elevated foundation with the proper flood openings. Some can be expensive, such as elevating a slab-on-grade structure. Therefore the assistance includes a discussion of possible financial assistance and all relevant regulatory requirements. Some instances may include a site visit to determine the source of flood damage and to review alternative protection measures. These may be followed by a written summary of the flood problem and recommended alternatives. The reviews will include how elevating a building, retrofitting flood openings, and having the proper enclosed areas can reduce flood insurance premiums.

The committee discussed this service and made two recommendations:

First, in the past, the public has been advised of this service through an annual mailing to all properties in the community or all properties in the SFHA. This has proven to be very expensive and publicizes the service to many people who do not need it.

The committee discussed the real target audience in the Lee County multijurisdictional area. It was decided that in most cases the target audience would not be all properties in the community and that it would be more appropriate to identify a more narrow audience that are most likely to experience flooding and benefit from this assistance. This audience is not community-wide nor is it entirely in the SFHA.

When the communities mapped their repetitive loss areas, they followed a process designed to help decide which areas are at risk of flooding using NFIP data, local data, and statistics. First, the communities mapped structures that had received at least one or more flood insurance claim to the NFIP, then the dates of the claims were compared to the dates of known weather events to determine the potential causes of flooding. Topographic data was used to identify areas with significantly lower elevations than the developed areas with no flood claims. Two-foot contours and a LiDAR DEM were used as a background to help with visualization of topography. The process also looked at the areas that are most vulnerable to storm surge along the coast and shoreline, populated areas along interior waterways, areas that the communities have had detailed studies due to flooding and/or local knowledge of problematic flooding. The result of mapping the many layers of information is that the communities were able to better determine the areas and specific structures that may be subject to flooding. It was determined that their repetitive loss areas represent the audience that would most benefit from the flood protection assistance service.

While an annual notice to repetitive loss area properties will be the primary publicity vehicle for the service, it was decided that the assistance should also be included in other media that reach a wider audience, such as on each community's website, the All Hazards Guide, and notices to lenders, real estate agents, and insurance agents.

The second recommendation of the PPI committee was to make sure that the PPI's messages be conveyed to people receiving the assistance. For example, the memos or e-mails with the recommendations from the visit should include the following messages in one form or another:

- Protect your investment by buying or keeping a flood insurance policy (Message 2)

- Protect your family, too. Get a print or online copy of the Lee County All Hazards Guide. (Message 4)
- Learn about the building regulations and get a permit before you start. (Messages 5c and 5a)

As part of the annual PPI assessment, the requests for assistance will be cross-referenced to the addresses in the repetitive loss areas which will serve two purposes:

- Determine if the request for flood protection assistance has increased in the targeted outreach areas (Outcome R4)
- Add a data set used in the process of determining the repetitive loss areas.

**Insurance Promotion:** This PPI document includes communication that supports the goal of increasing flood insurance coverage. A lender sits on the PPI Committee. The PPI includes the assessment of NFIP coverage for number of policies in each jurisdiction in the AE and VE flood zones, and the number of policies covering residential and non-residential structures. An outcome for five of the six outreach projects is to increase the number of NFIP flood insurance policies in the jurisdictions. This document establishes 2015 baseline coverage rates for single family residences and non-residential structures in each jurisdiction and sets the 2015 baseline number of policies for single-family homes, residential 2-4 units, other residential units, and non-residential structures.

**Rep Loss Area Outreach:** The PPI identifies repetitive loss areas as a target area and includes two outreach projects to separate target audiences: residents and non-resident owners of houses in repetitive loss areas. It also verifies that the outreach messages promote flood insurance, flood protection assistance and warning systems and response.

**Drainage System Maintenance:** Florida’s Stream Dumping Regulations make dumping or obstructing flows in ditches and streams illegal. In this PPI, Outreach Projects 2 and 4 will bring the message “Don’t block natural flowways,” to all permit applicants and non-resident owners of properties in repetitive loss areas. The message “Report blocked ditches, swales and canals,” is delivered in Outreach Projects 1, 3, 5 and 6. The projects will outline the benefits of these messages, including reduction of neighborhood flooding. It will also include the consequences violating the Florida Statute.

**Flood Warning and Response:** Normally, the public is advised of this service through an annual mailing to all properties in the community or all properties in the SFHA. The committee favors an alternative approach for four reasons:

1. Government mailers are more likely to be tossed as junk mail than to actually be read and saved.
2. The expense of a multijurisdictional mailing to 119,424 structures is estimated to be approximately \$47,770. This is based on a cost of \$.40 per mailer including stationery and bulk mail rates. Due to the committee’s desire to communicate several messages, it was decided that this communication would not be appropriate for a mailed postcard or a utility bill stuffer. Also note that no single utility company covers the entire jurisdiction. Not all of the jurisdictions have an existing mailer that can “piggy-back” for this mailing.
3. The most compelling reason the committee embraced the alternative is that many outreach projects already exist in the multijurisdictional area to communicate about flood warning

systems and response as well as flood hazard and safety messages. These saturate the Southwest Florida area throughout the June 1-October 31 storm season. Led by the Lee County Emergency Operations staff, all jurisdictions participate in hurricane preparedness outreach. The Lee County EOC distributes 25,000 All Hazards Guides throughout the county. This guide includes an abundance of information about both criteria for 610 – notice of the warning system and recommended safety measures for a flood. Its hurricane preparedness seminars reach more than 3,500 people annually. In addition, all jurisdictions have newsletters and/or web sites that explain flood warning systems and hazards and promote safety information. Beyond that, stakeholder groups participate in hurricane season communication – all of which highlights flood warning and response information coupled with messages about flood hazard risks and safety measures. These include:

- Four major newspapers with a combined circulation of more than 200,000: The News-Press, Naples Daily News, Florida Weekly – Fort Myers, and Breeze Newspapers – which has five community newspapers, all publish annual hurricane guides for both print and online distribution during June. In addition, these newspapers repeat this information often during hurricane season as part of their coverage of tropical storms, storm anniversaries and rainy season events.
  - NBC, CBS, ABC and Fox local television broadcast affiliates reach all of Southwest Florida with routine storm warning, response and hazard safety information. Each also posts an online Hurricane Guide and routinely references warning and response information and flood safety information as part of coverage of tropical storms, storm anniversaries and rainy season events.
  - WGCU, the Public Radio station affiliated with Florida Gulf Coast University and a communication partner with the Lee County Emergency Operations Center, and all major radio stations similarly broadcast this information.
  - The Lee County Electric Coop includes this information in its billing at least once annually – often more frequently in stormy seasons.
  - All local Publix and Home Depot stores distribute this information, and Home Depot holds several preparedness seminars at its stores during June.
  - In jurisdictions where Publix and Home Depot do not exist, smaller chains or private grocery and hardware stores fill this role.
  - The Lee County Public Information Officer conducted a survey of all major distributors of hurricane season guides and analyzed the content. Her survey found at least a dozen additional hurricane season outreach projects that re-distribute the flood warning and response and hazard safety information distributed by the Lee County Emergency Operations Center.
  - This information is posted in all libraries throughout Lee County.
4. The final reason the committee prefers the alternative outreach is that the news media is now the primary source of storm, weather and impending disaster information. However, every reporter, editor, anchor, blogger, etc. is communicating something different. An important objective of this PPI is to *encourage a unified message consistent with NFIP and CRS objectives*. That consistency will be extended to communication to insurance agents, real estate agents, lenders, residents of repetitive loss areas and non-resident owners of property in the repetitive loss areas. A clear and consistent message will be distributed in the way it is most likely to be received. Specifically, the flood warning system information will be communicated through the message: Choose your flood warning system. The committee is encouraging individuals not

simply to turn on the TV or radio to learn if a storm is coming, but to **CHOOSE** a method of personal notification. In this jurisdiction, those options include:

- **CodeRed** – A free telephone, text or email service;
- **LeeEvac for iPhone** – A free app for Apple devices that pushes evacuation notifications in real time during emergencies and which also allows users to search for evacuation zones by street address;
- **LeeEvac for Android** – A free app for Android devices that pushes evacuation notifications in real time during emergencies and which also allows users to search for evacuation zones by street address or by GPS;
- **Facebook** – This Facebook page posts real time updates about emergency conditions and always offers general preparedness information;
- **Twitter** – There are two Twitter accounts: [@LeeEOC](#) - offers purely emergency information, and [@LCEMFL](#) - offers also includes general and preparedness information;
- **IPAWS** – Lee County Public Safety is a FEMA Integrated Public Alert Warning System (IPAWS) Alerting Authority. We can utilize the IPAWS to alert and warn Lee County residents and visitors about serious emergencies through various means, including the Emergency Alert System (EAS), Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio.

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