



FEMA's PROJECT IMPACT: Building Disaster-Resistant Communities

by: Patrick Fridgen

In the last decade alone, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has spent more than \$25 billion to help communities recover after natural disasters. This staggering number does not even include private insurance claims, additional government agency aid, lost revenues for businesses, lost

jobs, and worst of all, loss of human life.

In an effort to minimize the tremendous tolls that natural disasters have taken on communities throughout the United States, FEMA has implemented what is known as Project Impact. Project Impact changes the way communities deal with natural disasters by helping

communities prepare themselves *before* disasters strike. FEMA estimates that for every dollar they allocate toward disaster prevention, they are able to save at least two in future repairs.

Project Impact was first started in the fall of 1997, and since its inception, there are now over 125 participating communities nationwide. Within North Dakota, Project Impact has been implemented in three communities thus far. The first North Dakota Project Impact community was Fargo, followed by Valley City, and most recently, Jamestown. These communities have always faced threats from natural disasters such as tornadoes, blizzards, and even wild fires, however, in recent years the most apparent threat has come from flood-related disasters. The flood of 1997 is undoubtedly the most vivid reminder, although, the city of Jamestown has been included in the

Flooding on the Red River north of Fargo, April 1997.



past seven Presidential disaster declarations in North Dakota for flooding from 1993 to 1999. Through the implementation of Project Impact, these communities are hopeful that they can greatly reduce the damages from flooding and other disasters by being prepared for them in advance.

Numerous activities have taken place in Fargo, Valley City, and Jamestown through Project Impact initiatives. The City of Fargo has been extremely proactive in buying out properties and constructing levees in flood-prone areas.

Valley City has started master planning activities within the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), which include installing sluice gates, eliminating sewer system problems, training and education programs, and strategic land use planning.

In Jamestown, HMGP funds have been allocated toward lift station improvements, raising electrical panels, and retrofitting buildings to prevent future sewage backup problems. They have also identified an oxbow along the James River, where they intend to place a large lift station to isolate and pump water out to prevent surface flooding in adjacent low-lying areas. In addition, Jamestown has been working with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers to provide permanent flood protection structures such as dikes.

The communities of Fargo, Valley City, and Jamestown now have a unique opportunity to play an important role in safeguarding themselves against disasters. The backbone of FEMA's Project Impact relies on three main principles that keep all facets of the community involved. These principles are:

- Deciding preventative actions at the local level (individuals who are familiar with the community often times have the greatest understanding

of its vulnerabilities toward natural disasters).

- Participation by private business sectors (if Project Impact is successful within communities, the time lost from productive activity is minimized for both businesses and their employees when disasters strike).

- A long-term commitment by communities toward disaster prevention (by committing to a long-term effort through Project Impact, citizens are investing in the future safety and livelihood of their communities).

The Project Impact Guidebook

FEMA publishes a Project Impact Guidebook, which is intended to guide communities through the process of becoming effective Project Impact participants. The guidebook contains four chapters:

- Chapter One, describes how individuals interested in Project Impact initiatives can identify and build constructive partnerships within their communities. This chapter lends additional guidance by not only helping communities identify *who* they should be contacting for their cooperative efforts, but also, *why* these groups will be beneficial as partners.

- Chapter Two, helps communities identify and examine their potential risks for natural disasters. By successfully identifying the communities' vulnerabilities toward disasters, planners are provided with the solid background that is neces-

sary to eventually build mitigation priorities.

- Chapter Three, guides communities through targeting financial resources. In addition, Chapter Three assists communities in prioritizing the actions they intend to take in reducing their disaster potential.

- By Chapter Four, communities are well on their way to becoming disaster resistant. They have assessed their risks for natural disasters, and have written a plan to build a more disaster resistant community based on local circumstances. Chapter Four then makes the point that it is extremely important for communities to stay focussed in their Project Impact efforts. It also gives pointers on how communities can help all community members understand what the disaster resistant community initiatives are, why they are important to all community members, and how individuals can be supportive and get involved.

Though the Project Impact Guidebook is an excellent source for communities throughout this process, they should also know that FEMA sometimes provides sample materials, resources, and additional program ideas as they arise through experiences in other communities taking part in Project Impact efforts.

For information on how to become a Project Impact community, contact FEMA at (202)-646-4600, for Project Impact publications and information call 1-800-227-4731, or visit FEMA's web site at <http://www.fema.gov> on the Internet. ■

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THE WATER PRIMER

Managing North Dakota's Water Resources (Part 2)

The North Dakota Department of Health is the focus of this second in a series of articles dealing with water resource management in North Dakota.

The activities of the Department of Health are extremely broad in scope, and encompass a wide spectrum of disciplines. However, for the purpose of this article, only the water-related activities will be discussed.

From a historical perspective, the Department of Health originated as the Territorial Board of Health in 1885. In 1889, following North Dakota's statehood, the State Board of Health was established. Many additional changes occurred in the ensuing years.

In 1987, the State Department of Health and the State Laboratories Department were consolidated to form the State Department of Health and Consolidated Laboratories. The name was shortened to its present form in 1995 and, at that time, the Department was designated by the Legislature as the primary environmental agency for the state.

The Department of Health has three sections under the direction of the State Health Officer. One of these is the Environmental Health Section. The primary goal of the Environmental Health Section is to safeguard the quality of North Dakota's air, land, and water resources. Another important goal is to maintain control of federal environmental programs in North Dakota and ensure that programs and activities comply with state environmental statutes.

Of the five divisions of the Environmental Health Section, two are primarily responsible for water-related activities: the Division of Water Quality and the Division of Municipal Facilities. A third, the Division of Chemistry, provides support by analyzing water samples.

In general, the primary responsibility of the Division of Water Quality is to ensure that North Dakota's water resources are kept safe and clean for the state's citizens today, as well as into the future. To accomplish this, the Division of Water Quality operates under the guidelines of the federal Clean Water Act of 1972. This act, and its amendments, have played a key role in improving the quality of North Dakota's water resources. Even before the Clean Water Act, however, North Dakota recognized the value of water quality and enacted its own law to protect water resources—the North Dakota Water Pollution Control Act of 1967.

The aforementioned federal and state acts are administered through the following programs: 1) the Pollution Discharge Elimination System Permit Program; 2) the Non-point Source Pollution Management Program; 3) the Wellhead Protection Program; 4) the Underground Injection Control Program; 5) the Livestock Waste Management Program; and 6) the Surface and Groundwater Management Programs.

The Division of Municipal Facilities also plays an important role in managing North Dakota's water resources. This division works to

ensure that all North Dakota citizens' drinking water supply is safe.

In order for the Division of Municipal Facilities to accomplish this goal, they have developed four instrumental programs. Those programs include: 1) the Public Water Supply Supervision Program; 2) the Operator Training, Certification and Facilities Inspections Program; 3) the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund Program; and 4) the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund Program.

By monitoring for contaminants, providing operator training, conducting inspections, reviewing plans and specifications, and providing financial and technical assistance, the Division of Municipal Facilities secures compliance with the drinking water standards established by the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Through the above programs and legislative measures, the Department of Health tries to maintain an optimal balance between reducing negative impacts to the state's natural resources while continuing to improve and promote economic development within the state. Because the quality of North Dakota's water plays such a crucial role in its future success, the Department of Health continually monitors any potential impacts to the state's water resources, and modifies, as well as improves their various programs to meet the changing times.

For additional information contact the North Dakota Department of Health at (701) 328-5150, or <http://www.health.state.nd.us/ndhd>. ■