

SECTION 4: LOCAL MITIGATION PROGRAM COORDINATION

4.1 LOCAL CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT

OVERVIEW

The preparation of Local Hazard Mitigation Plans (LHMPs) is a precondition for receipt of Hazard Mitigation Grant Project funds under the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) which also requires that states examine LHMPs as part of their SHMP process. FEMA has established mitigation planning requirements for local jurisdictions to meet, among other things, to demonstrate that proposed mitigation actions are based on a sound planning process that accounts for the inherent risk and capabilities of the individual communities.

The Ohio EMA Mitigation Branch administers the LHMP Program for the state. The Mitigation Branch supports and assists local governments in the development and update of LHMPs. In 2002 and 2003, significant amount of federal and state PDM funds were provided to develop LHMPs. For the time period spanning from the 2005 plan to the 2008 update, the main planning emphasis of the Mitigation Branch has been to get LHMPs reviewed, adopted, and FEMA approved. From 2008 to 2011, the emphasis will shift to tracking LHMP progress and effectiveness in a more quantitative way, and integrating plan information more significantly into the state plan. Another goal of the Mitigation Branch is for all local governments in Ohio to have FEMA-approved LHMPs. Currently, Ohio has a very good LHMP participation rate. Based on a November 2007 report from FEMA Region V:

- **76.4%** of the population of Ohio was situated in a community with a locally adopted, FEMA approved plan.
- **20.1%** of the population of Ohio was situated in a community with a plan that has been developed, met FEMA requirements for LHMPs, but had not yet been locally adopted.
- **3.5%** of the population of Ohio was situated in a community with no plan or a plan in progress that has neither been reviewed by FEMA nor adopted.

Based on data as of May 2008, 82 of 88 counties have multi-jurisdiction plans are either adopted and FEMA approved or certified that they meet FEMA planning requirements (but not adopted), and the remaining 6 counties are in the process of developing a plan. This is a significant increase from 2005 where only 17 plans had been “certified” which means at that time the state had been given authority to approve the plans on behalf of FEMA (see the more in-depth discussion of certification in the 2005 plan). A county-by-county plan status report is included in Appendix D.

In the 2008 SHMP update, the Mitigation Branch undertook a cursory evaluation of all FEMA-approved LHMPs to identify trends and issues. For the next state plan update, the mitigation branch hopes to conduct a much more in-depth review of LHMPs and conduct a survey of local “plan keepers” (the folks who, according to Mitigation Branch records, are the local point of contact for the plan)

to identify the challenges faced by communities in developing, maintaining, and implementing the LHMPs.

AUTHORITIES RELATED TO HAZARD MITIGATION

Local authority to implement a comprehensive hazard mitigation program is ample. Ultimately, it is up to each local jurisdiction to determine which mix of authorities, programs, policies, and capabilities it wants to develop. All Ohio communities (cities, villages, and counties) have the power to develop and adopt many different kinds of plans including comprehensive plans, capital improvement plans, economic development plans, emergency operations/response plans, continuity of operations plans, and hazard mitigation plans to name a few. Communities have regulatory powers to adopt zoning, subdivision, building and development, floodplain management and health codes. Ohio communities have the power to levee taxes / assessments for special purposes (including petition ditch projects, stormwater utilities) and have the authority to borrow funds (bonding). Finally, communities have the authority to create planning, emergency management, health, public works, economic development and other needed agencies. All of these authorities have, or potentially could have, a bearing on local hazard mitigation.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF LHMPs

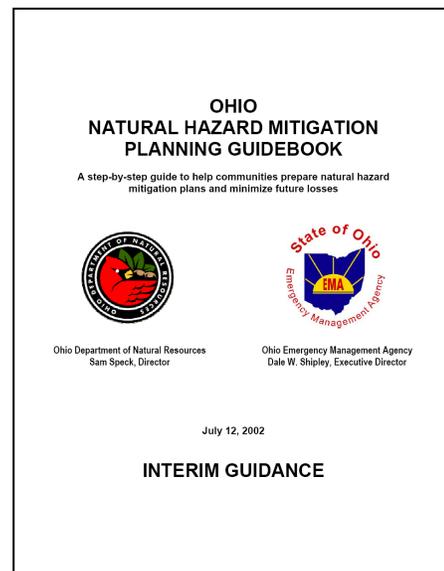
Because the Mitigation Branch has reviewed each LHMP, some trends were clearly evident. Again, these trends are based in a qualitative, not quantitative review of the LHMPs.

Overall Plan Quality

Overall, LHMPs involved many local agencies/entities and are of a good quality. It was noted that the quality of the plan is not dependent on its size; rather, it is the format and quality of information in the plan that is more important. Some of the best LHMPs are small to moderate sized.

Many LHMPs utilized FEMA's planning how-to publications; however, even more utilized the Ohio Natural Hazard Planning Guidebook. The handbook was written to be one volume with the intent to create a basic LHMP. In reality, Mitigation Branch staff advised LHMP plan keepers to use both resources.

Definitions used in the LHMPs were not consistent. The areas where inconsistencies were most evident was in defining critical facilities, identifying what constitutes a mitigation action, and defining hazards to which a community was susceptible.



The way LHMPs conducted risk assessments and ranked hazards to which communities are susceptible was extremely variable. Variability in the risk assessment process and data sources used is not surprising given that communities have significantly different amounts and quality of data. In terms of ranking hazards, some LHMPs did rank the hazards based on a numerical ranking (using a matrix or scoring system), some developed a relative ranking system (one hazard ranked higher than another but no number identified), and some developed a qualitative ranking system (ranking hazards as high, medium or low threat). However, flooding, severe summer storms, high winds/tornadoes, and severe winter storms were consistently ranked high or severe.

Single community LHMPs tended to be much more focused than did multi-jurisdictional mitigation plans. Although the overwhelming majority of mitigation plans in Ohio are multi-jurisdictional (90%+), some jurisdictions felt that a stand-alone plan would be more meaningful. While we do not have data to determine whether this is true, the stand-alone plans were much more focused on specific issues.

Mitigation Policies, Programs & Capabilities

Local mitigation policies and programs can be best understood by reviewing the local mitigation strategies. Those strategies should indicate whether policies or programs exist and need to be modified, or whether they exist at all. A few trends were noted.

It was evident that larger communities and counties have more extensive policies and programs in place vs. smaller communities. Many of the local strategies pertaining to larger local governments tended to be geared towards refining or enhancing existing policies and programs vs. creating them. The reverse was seen with smaller units of government.

A similar trend was seen with local mitigation capability. Participants in the planning process for larger communities tended to be professional staff positions and/or multiple persons, while participants for smaller communities ranged from the mayor to council members, to an appointed citizen.

Mitigation policies/programs/capabilities varied significantly from community to community and county to county. Some communities and counties had very sophisticated mitigation programs either demonstrated by the sophistication of their mitigation plans/goals/actions or the integration of mitigation programs. In addition, some communities developed their own, stand-alone plans. On the other end of the spectrum were communities that have virtually no involvement in hazard mitigation.

Mitigation Actions

Mitigation actions identified in LHMPs were heavily influenced by whomever was leading the planning effort. For example, a LHMP developed in-house by a county emergency management agency had a tendency to focus on mitigation actions that were emergency management related. Similarly, LHMPs developed

by a county planning agency tended to have a focus on land use management measures.

It was evident that there was some confusion as to what constituted a mitigation goal/objective/action. Many actions in LHMPs were either preparedness or response actions. There is one LHMP where nearly every action is not related to hazard mitigation.

Education and outreach actions were the most numerous identified in LHMPs. Other actions that were frequently mentioned included flood mitigation projects (acquisitions, stream clearing/dredging), development of emergency action plans downstream of high hazard dams, shelter creation/development, upgrade regulations (building code, floodplain management regulations, zoning), and warning systems (flood/wind).