

Education and Outreach: Informing the Public of Flood Risk

WHY EDUCATE?

Education about flood preparedness and local flood risk is a crucial step in increasing community resilience. Education and outreach efforts can focus internally, with staff and volunteers, and externally with the public. Goals of education efforts might include:

Encouraging a culture of preparedness. Floods are extremely stressful, costly, and can happen anywhere. Raising awareness of actions community members can take before and during a flood such as having a disaster plan, knowing evacuation routes, and in some cases, purchasing flood insurance, can reduce losses and ease tension after a flood.

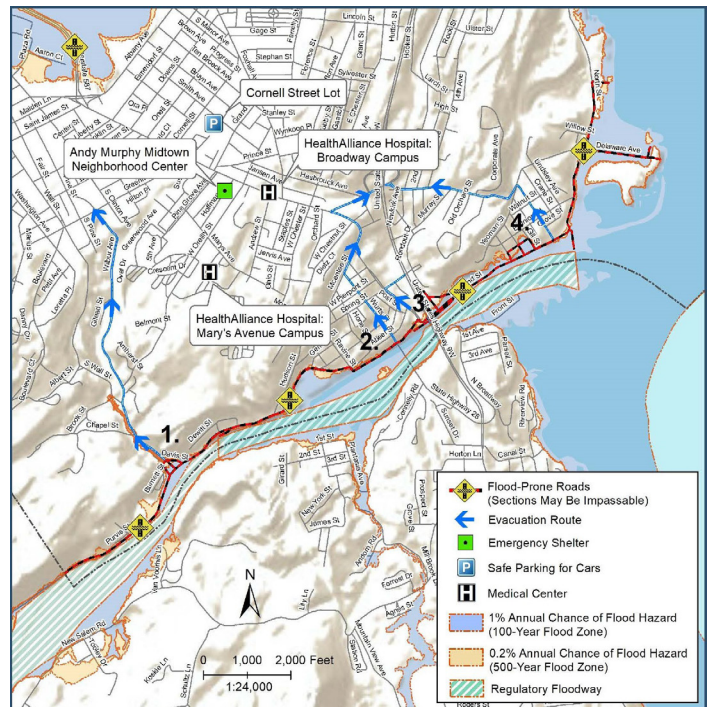
Protecting people, property, and the environment. If low-lying land floods now, it will likely flood more frequently in the future. When this is communicated to residents and developers, more informed decisions can be made that can help reduce flood losses. Raise awareness of the Special Flood Hazard Area and other locations of known flooding using maps, photos, and community voices. Raise awareness of mitigation actions individuals can take on their property.

Avoiding wasted time and money. When permissible options are communicated and discussed early in the construction process for new development, less time and money can be spent on preparing, reviewing, and approving applications. Ensure relevant staff and volunteers are informed on current and projected flood risk, floodplain management, and flood damage prevention laws.

Cultivating community buy-in. Community buy-in is essential for the often costly and time consuming effort to increase community resilience and plan for a changing climate. Identify community champions to participate in planning efforts and keep the public informed and engaged throughout.

Earn Points in Climate Smart Communities (CSC) and the Community Rating System (CRS)

Educating community members and establishing public communication campaigns around flooding can earn points in the New York State's Climate Smart Communities Program (Pledge Element 9, Inform and Inspire the Public) and the Community Rating System (300 Series, Public Information). More points in CSC can lead to Bronze or Silver Certification and can translate to higher scores in Climate Smart Communities grant applications, and more points in CRS can qualify communities for reductions in their NFIP insurance rates.



Several Hudson Valley communities have created Flood Preparedness Guides that include mapped flood zones, evacuation routes, local resources, and tips for what to do before, during, and after a flood. An excerpt from The City of Kingston's guide is pictured https://kingston-ny.gov/filestorage/8463/13525/City_of_Kingston_FloodGuide_FINAL.pdf

COMMUNICATION TIPS

Different messages and methods of communication should be used for different members of the community depending on their needs and interests. Create outreach plans and seek out partnerships with county and regional organizations to help get the word out and to refine messaging. Some best practices for communicating with broad audiences are listed below:

- Use brief talking points, as seen in the following examples:
 - A House Benefits Only One - Natural Floodplains Benefit the Entire Community!
 - Build Higher: Build Safer
 - Anywhere it can rain, it can flood
 - Just one inch of water can cause more than \$25,000 in damage to your home
- Avoid jargon. Messages should be clear and concise.
- Be credible, it is best to provide science or fact-based information in order to maintain trust with the community. Be sure to provide answers to any questions that arise and address mis-information quickly.
- Tell stories and use statistics. Share statistics on losses in dollar amounts from recent or historic flood events, particularly local examples.
- Test your message. Ask others to review the messages in order to make sure it is understood. It is best to pilot with multiple end-users who represent the audience.
- Communicate in multiple ways. Not everyone uses the same pathways to access information. Be sure to send messages across various platforms including digital, social media, mail, and telephone, etc.



Many communities have created Know Your Zone public education campaigns to inform the residents, businesses and visitors of hurricane evacuation zones and their vulnerability to storm surge. An excerpt from New York City's campaign guide is pictured (<https://www.nyc.gov/site/em/ready/coastal-storms-hurricanes.page>)

RESOURCES

There are several resources available on how to effectively create outreach campaigns that communicate to a range of audiences, including homeowners and the general public.

- Seven Best Practices for Risk Communication (NOAA): [bit.ly/NOAA7BestPracticesRiskComms](https://www.noaa.gov/resources/learning/7-best-practices-for-risk-communication)
- Flood Risk Communication Toolkit for Community Officials (FEMA): [bit.ly/FEMAFloodRiskCommunicationToolkit](https://www.fema.gov/flood-risk-communication-toolkit)
- The Toolkit includes templates and guides for designing a communication plan, effective public meetings, and a social media strategy for addressing flood risk. It is supported by story maps and videos that visually communicate the objectives of updating flood risk data and maps.
- No Adverse Impact Education & Outreach How-to Guide (ASFPM): [bit.ly/ASFPMNAIEducationOutreach](https://www.asfpm.org/education-outreach)

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