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## **1. Background**

Cecil, Dorchester, and Talbot County have a number of ongoing outreach efforts with goals to increase flood hazard awareness and to motivate actions to reduce flood damage, encourage flood insurance coverage, and protect the natural functions of floodplains. The Community Rating System (CRS) is a voluntary program under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) that allows communities to earn flood insurance premium discounts for their residents and businesses by conducting floodplain management activities that exceed NFIP minimum requirements. Cecil County has a current CRS class rating of 7, Dorchester has a current rating of 8, and Talbot County has a current rating of 8.

The three Counties' purpose in developing this plan is to improve communication with citizens, and to provide information about flood hazards, flood safety, flood insurance, and ways to protect property and natural floodplain functions to those who can benefit from it. In developing a PPI, local agencies mutually decide which flood risk reduction messages are most appropriate and design a region-wide program to deliver those messages. As stated in an Example PPI from Snohomish County, Washington:

The Program for Public Information is a planning tool to provide a step-by-step coordinated approach to flood hazard outreach. The PPI can be developed and implemented by a single community or with other communities as a multi-jurisdictional effort. The purpose is the same: to improve communication with citizens, and to provide information about flood hazards, flood safety, flood insurance and ways to protect property and natural floodplain functions to those who can benefit from it. The intent of the CRS program, and the PPI, is to reduce injury to people and damage to property from future floods. Coordination between jurisdictions through a Multi-jurisdictional PPI further increases efficiency in resources and improves communication with citizens.

## **2. PPI Committee**

The role of the PPI Committee is to provide input about target audiences, types and delivery of messages, and insight into ongoing efforts in the community. The Committee recognizes the importance of having extensive input and partners to ensure appropriate target audiences are receiving the most appropriate flood hazard messages at the right time.

## **3. Assess the Community's Public Information Needs**

The PPI Committee assesses the Region's flood problems, identifies the appropriate audience for flood related topics, and reviews the inventory of projects that are already underway.

### **3.1 Target Areas and Audiences**

Target areas are focus areas or priority areas of the community with concerns related to floods or floodplains. They can be neighborhoods, districts, or other parts of the community with similar flooding, building, and population characteristics.

The CRS Community Self-Assessment is an online tool which asks a series of questions that lead to how flood hazards affect the community and which groups of residents could benefit from most outreach efforts and encouragement to purchase flood insurance. ESCAP communities are

welcome to conduct this assessment on their own (if they haven't already), as part of engaging with this planning process.

#### Community at Large

- The PPI Committee should recognize entire communities or neighborhoods that live and/or work in Cecil, Dorchester, and Talbot County that are subject to a variety of impacts due to flooding. The CRS typically focuses on residential flooding, but flooding of businesses and roads are also important.
- Everyone needs a family emergency plan. For residents who live in the SFHA, it is also important to purchase flood insurance. For people who work in the tidal zone, family emergency plans are particularly important, so they have flood safe routes identified to get safely out of the tidal flooding zone.

#### Special Flood Hazard Area Communities

- The PPI Committee should identify several geographic areas that are particularly prone to flooding. Within SFHA's, the PPI Committee should identify several key audiences that can be divided into two categories: those who are at risk of flood impacts and those who communicate to those who are at risk of flood impacts.
- Those at risk of flood impacts include property owners, renters and workers. Of special concern are groups with special evacuation needs, such as seniors and fixed low-income residents. The highest importance areas are the ones that have suffered from repetitive loss.
- Residents who are new to the area should be a specific target audience because they have not experienced flooding in the past. They are less likely to be aware of flood risks, sandbag locations and how to flood-proof a structure.

Lenders, real estate agencies or boards, developers/contractors and appraisers all serve as a messenger to people who are at risk of flooding as they provide their respective business service.

#### 3.2 Ongoing Public Information Efforts

#### 3.3 Priority Areas

#### 3.4 Flood Information Needs Survey

ESLC has offered to help develop a survey for this planning process.

### **4. Formulate Messages**

Outreach campaign messages must be accurate and concise to result in action and positive outcomes. The PPI Committee will use the information from the public information needs assessment to develop specific topics, messages, and expected outcomes based on the NFIP CRS floodplain management topics.

For each target audience, the PPI committee should determine what public information message is needed, considering the hazards and the natural floodplain functions in the target area, the characteristics of the audience, and other factors as appropriate. Messages are specific statements or directions that the community considers important for its audiences. The message must either clearly

state what the audience should do, or provide some basic information with a note on where to get more information.

## **5. Identify Outreach Projects to Convey the Messages**

Based on the public information needs assessment, the PPI committee identifies new, or improvements to existing, general flood information projects to increase flood awareness and motivate residents to take action. General outreach projects include:

1. Flood Information Brochures
2. Curb Placards
3. Annual Letter to Property Owners Within the SFHA
4. Informational Presentations to Neighborhood Councils
5. Information Booths at Community Events
6. Annual Flood Preparedness Week Proclamation

Media publications such as newspaper articles are tracked and included on the appropriate worksheets when they occur. These publications are irregular and normally only happen during higher rainfall years. It is not appropriate to rely on this reactive outreach for CRS credit. However, there are opportunities for Cecil, Dorchester, and Talbot County to become proactive through the local media.

All of the PPI projects noted above are directly related to CRS activities and serve to publicize many flood related services offered by the three counties. These projects will be disseminated in multiple ways to a variety of audiences on an annual or more frequent basis. A comprehensive project sheet including a detailed project description, audience(s), topic(s), message(s), outcome(s), related CRS activities and services, schedule, project administrator, and stakeholder(s) for each of these PPI projects should be included in the Appendices.

The Committee also identifies new, or improvements to existing, public information activities prepared in advance of the next flood. There are key messages that need to be disseminated before, during, and after a flood. The three counties' flood response messages and the tools used to disseminate them are consolidated into a Flood Warning and Response Preparations Package. The messages and dissemination tools in this package are centered on flood warning and response. They were prepared in advance, and will not be delivered until a flood is impending or occurs. The procedures for implementing the materials should be followed in accordance with the County's Emergency Services. The procedures and project materials are reviewed annually and updated as needed.

## **6. Outreach Initiatives**

### **6.1 Floodplain Management Planning**

Comprehensive floodplain management leads to safer, stronger, more resilient communities. Floodplain management planning involves a systematic process of identifying existing and future flood-related hazards and their causes, and planning preventative and corrective measures to reduce the risk of current and future flooding. These measures take a variety of forms, and are carried out by multiple stakeholders with a vested interest in responsible floodplain management. From states providing strong model ordinances, to communities adopting and enforcing higher-standard

building practices and providing public outreach, to property owners elevating their homes, everyone plays a role in making communities safer and more resistant to flood disasters.

#### 6.2 Flood Information Website

The site should include specific information on warning, safety, and evacuation when there is an impending flood, during a flood, and immediately after a flood, such as:

- Where the flooding will likely occur (link to map)
- Evacuation routes (link to map)
- Shelter locations (link to map)
- Flood Safety precautions (FRP messages)

#### 6.3 Real Estate Disclosure Program

Real estate agents are in an ideal position to inform buyers whether a property is in a flood zone and if flood insurance is required. With input from representatives of local realtor associations, the County could develop a real estate-centered flood disclosure and information brochure with a fillable section for agents to enter the property's flood hazard and insurance requirement information. A flyer could also be developed, distributed by the same realtor association, to publicize the brochure. Real estate agents would then advise house hunters about the flood hazard and provide the brochure to clients interested in purchasing properties located in the SFHA. Potential buyers would then be made aware of the flood hazard and the flood insurance purchase requirement.

#### 6.4 Flood Protection Assistance and Advisory Service

The County will provide one-on-one consultations, and site visits as appropriate, to advise inquirers about property protection measures, such as retrofitting techniques and drainage improvements. The objectives of including a Cecil, Dorchester, and Talbot County Flood Protection Assistance Advisory Program in this PPI are to

- Increase awareness and use of the service
- Enhance mitigation information provided

This will increase the likelihood that residents will undertake activities to reduce the flood hazard to their property and in turn could decrease property loss due to flooding.

This service is available to all residents, and the service is publicized on the Counties' Flood Information website and in the flood information brochure, which are available at the County Administration building and town meetings. Those most likely to experience flooding and benefit from this assistance, however, should be directly advised of this service. Therefore, a letter and the flood information brochure, containing information about the service, will be mailed directly to residents and businesses in Repetitive Loss Areas annually. Additionally, the real estate flood information brochure, which also includes information about this service, will be provided by real estate agents to buyers of properties in the SFHA.

County/Town staff providing this service should discuss flood mitigation options and recommend discussing retrofit options further with their insurance agent. Staff should also urge inquirers to work closely with design professionals. A Flood Protection Advice database should also be developed to log inquiries and generate an information report to provide to inquirers.

#### 6.5 Flood Insurance Coverage Plan

In addition to building flood control projects and regulating new development in the floodplain to protect people from the consequences of flooding, the Counties advocate flood insurance. Many people are not aware that flood insurance is available, and many of those who are aware do not see a need to insure their property. The PPI Committee should perform an assessment of the level of flood insurance coverage and develop a coverage plan. The plan includes target audiences and specific messages and projects that publicize the availability of flood insurance and its importance as a preparedness measure.

Additionally, the flood insurance providers on the Counties PPI Committees should serve as voluntary insurance advocates that advise people who have questions about flood insurance. The PPI Committee decides that this service should be publicized through County/Town Flood and Insurance Information outlets. This is a countywide service that must be publicized.

#### 6.6 Natural Functions Open Space Educational Materials

Floodplains are an important community asset. The rise and fall of flowing water, combined with the connections to upland and aquatic resources, is what makes riparian ecosystems so special. Moisture in the soil leads to a greater diversity of plant species. But floodplains don't only provide for wildlife conservation areas, they are also commonly found in parks and other open spaces, where passive trails tend to make our neighborhoods more appealing to citizens, potential employers, and visitors. Some of the best outdoor community amenities are those preserved and developed according to their original functions and because of their scenic value, can become sources of neighborhood pride.

Some of our more important natural areas, including coastal wetlands, non-tidal wetlands, intermittent, and perennial streams are worth adapting to, rather than trying to control, since lower cost investments made by preserving Green Infrastructure can help to offset expensive capital improvements for pollution control in the future. For example, groundwater supply quality is greatly improved when healthy vegetation is found within intact, connected stream and wetland systems. Floodplains provide many benefits, including storage and conveyance of flood waters, recharging of groundwater, maintenance of surface water quality, limiting erosion, and providing for fish and wildlife habitat. Many different government agencies and community partners with different goals can find common ground in floodplains, and it's important to tap this energy to plan and collaborate together.

#### 6.7 Stream Dumping Regulation

Cecil, Dorchester, and Talbot County can enforce, or continue to enforce, a regulation that prohibits dumping or debris in the drainage system. Landscapers and storm water managers are identified as the target audiences to be notified about the regulation. Landscapers are in a position to prevent materials from getting into the County's natural floodplains and drainage and conveyance systems. Additionally, they are required to attend Landscape BMP Certification classes, which include information about the regulation and about protecting natural floodplain functions.

The Counties should support an "Only Rain Down the Drain" campaign, which publicizes the County regulation and educates businesses, residents, and visitors about natural floodplains and how they can protect watersheds and prevent flooding caused by drainage system blockages. This outreach includes storm drain markers, door hangers, informational website, brochures, and neighborhood presentations. The Counties will facilitate distribution of these materials and information.

#### 6.8 Emergency Notifications Publicity

The extent of the damage caused by a flood is related not just to its severity, but also early warning to provide timely and effective information that enables people and communities to respond before severe weather hits that may cause flooding. As such, efforts to reduce flood loss throughout the Counties, are focused, in part, on early warning systems and providing timely and effective information that enables people and communities to respond when severe weather hits. The County's Flood Warning and Response Preparations Packages include numerous messages and outreach projects that are prepared in advance, but not implemented until a flood is impending or occurs.

#### 6.9 Flood Awareness Media Campaign

Reaching community at large, this campaign typically includes newspaper ads, radio spots, and on-line banner ads, which can run a certain time of the year.

#### 6.10 Potential Initiative for Future Consideration

Pollution Hotline is listed in all Neighborhood Notices.

Contest for children and youth may be organized to promote developing family Emergency Plans.

The committee will endeavor to recruit a celebrity to help disseminate key messages. The first priority will be to encourage people to prepare family emergency plans.

To address the dangers of driving through shallow flooded areas, the committee will contact each city to install permanent "Subject to Flooding" warning signs at 2 key locations per community, as applicable.

### **7. Annual Evaluation**

The PPI Committee should meet a minimum of two times per year to evaluate the PPI for the effectiveness of its projects, audiences, messages, and outcomes and to monitor the implementation of the outreach projects. Each year the Committee distributes a citizen survey and evaluates the results to guide appropriate PPI document updates that may increase the effectiveness of the program. The

Committee also evaluates the need for additional projects. In addition to the projects included in this PPI, the committee should discuss potential future projects.

The yearly meetings will evaluate the PPI Plan and incorporate any needed revisions. The evaluation will cover the following:

- Review projects that were completed
- Evaluate the progress toward outcomes
- Craft recommendations on projects that have not been completed
- Craft recommendations for new projects not previously identified
- Target Audience changes
- Evaluate the impact of program during a real flood event, if one has occurred

The committee will re-evaluate these projects and prepare PPI project update reports during its annual review. This PPI document will be updated, approved by the Committee, and submitted to the Counties for approval each year.

#### **8. Plan Adoption**

The Multi-Jurisdictional PPI will be considered fully adopted after it has been approved by the elected body of each of the participating communities. The plan will also be reviewed and approved by FEMA.