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Advocacy Position Statement

Public Works and Flood Map Modernization Program

Statement of Purpose

The American Public Works Association (APWA) seeks to inform elected officials, regulators, stakeholders and the public at-large of its stated position on the importance of fully funding of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Flood Map Modernization Program, Risk MAP.

Statement of Position

Public works professionals play a key role in emergency planning, response and recovery from flooding. Operating and maintaining critical infrastructure services, such as pumping mechanisms and drainage systems, levees and dams which directly impact the ability to respond to a flood event. In emergency management, while the strength of critical infrastructure is essential, the probability of flooding—and to what degree—is key to mitigation. As first responders, public works professionals rely heavily on Risk MAP to protect communities.

APWA recognizes and supports the full funding of Risk MAP. Through Risk MAP, keeping flood maps current, digitalizing them, and enhancing hazard assessment tools will improve the ability of public works agencies' optimum performance by reducing risk through more effective emergency planning—ultimately saving on recovery and response costs.

Background and Rationale

Identifying flood risk and maintaining up-to-date flood maps falls under FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program. APWA urges all government officials to increase awareness and insist on the continued investment of Risk Map. Public works' specialized capabilities are directly impacted by Risk MAP in the following ways:

- Flood maps identify the degree of risk to public works facilities such as water and wastewater treatment plants, storage yards, fleet or other public buildings for which public works agencies are responsible for. Mapping affects agencies' need for mitigation measures and the level and type of flood insurance needed.
- Flood maps are critical to planning emergency response measures such as evacuation routes, the placement of barricades, sand-bags, debris removal activity, water distribution, wastewater/storm water collection systems/outages and the

protection of water and wastewater treatment infrastructure. Effective emergency planning will help prevent property loss and quickly restore service to critical infrastructure.

- Flood maps inform public works about areas within communities that may need to be evacuated during or in the aftermath of a flood. This allows for the planning of evacuation routes, the need for temporary shelters and setting up central command emergency communication centers.
- Flood maps also determine the level of protection levees provide in flood prone areas. The United States' levees are badly in need of inspection and repair, and as such, this massive infrastructure overhaul has vast implications on public works capital budgets—which are often severely limited in today's economy. However, continued funding for flood map updates will help to identify which levees need renovations while simultaneously reducing risk by saving on response and recovery costs in the long-run.
- Flood maps and flood control projects are intimately related, as the maps will show where flood control and drainage projects need to be undertaken.

Through flood map modernization, FEMA strives to benefit communities nationwide and the public works agencies that watch over them. However, some times communities are protected by elevated structures such as railroad tracks and roads that act as levees. According to levee certification requirements and FEMA's power of accreditation, the railroads and roads that act as levees are not considered as such. Consequently, these 'levees' are not depicted on flood maps and the area that is protected is actually shown as a Special Flood Hazard Area on flood maps. For communities who are indeed protected in reality, but are considered unprotected by FEMA, these residents are forced to purchase flood insurance even if they do not need it. Low income residents are particularly impacted by this additional cost, as they will be required to pay for flood insurance—something they may not be able to afford.

When taking this scenario into consideration, lawmakers and stakeholders alike should consider the following:

- Often times, structures that act as levees protect residents more often than certified and accredited levees that protect against the 1-percent-annual chance or 100-year flood base standard used by the NFIP.
- For residents who are protected by structures that act as levees and are still required to purchase flood insurance, their rates should be significantly reduced, as they are protected far more often than those at risk of the 100-year flood.
- FEMA should allow credit based on the level of protection the structure provides to communities. A risk-based analysis should be conducted to determine the degree to which residents are prone to flooding based on the existence of the structure if they reside in a floodplain.

Flooding of any type and size can significantly affect the nation, its citizens, and communities. Such disasters may cause death and injury, property and job loss, and disruption of public services. Every flood provides valuable lessons that, if implemented, can greatly improve

community preparedness and response capabilities. For example, the tragic events of Hurricane Katrina that caused catastrophic flooding in New Orleans in 2005 and the devastating Midwest Floods in 2008 bring forth new challenges for the nation's public works professionals to adequately prepare for and respond to such disasters.

Through continued and full funding of Risk MAP, public works will be able to bridge the gap between flood hazard risk assessment, emergency planning, and the practice of implementing response and recovery strategies.

Sponsor

Emergency Management Committee