

*“Improve preparedness to minimize the destruction from natural disasters.” Dallas Session**



Would preventative measures have saved these houses?

Tragic and Costly Disasters

- The cost of all disasters runs high in terms of environmental, economic, and social impacts: more than 10,000 deaths since 1900 and over \$180 billion in damages just between 1998-2000.
- In 2000, the Nation suffered losses of 7.3 million acres of forests, homes, and other flora due to fires.
- From 1987-1997, there were six earthquakes in California with a magnitude of 6.5 or greater resulting in almost \$26 billion in losses.
- Risks are increasing as the population grows and moves to the coasts and from potential weather calamities from global warming.
- Overall extreme weather events cost the Nation an estimated \$15.8 billion a year.
- Floods and winter storms cost the U.S. an estimated \$3.4 billion and 150 lives each year.

Proactive approach with more local involvement indicated

In recent years, the United States has experienced a series of major disasters which have had accumulated economic, environmental, and social impacts. Examples include the Loma Prieta and Northridge earthquakes in

**Topics in this paper were identified at 16 Listening Sessions between June and November 2000. The purposes of the Listening Sessions were to start a dialogue and to provide citizens an opportunity to tell us what they believed the Federal role should be in addressing water resources.*

California, the record flooding in the Mississippi (1993), and on the Red River in Grand Forks, North Dakota (1997), hurricanes like Andrew, Inicki, Marilyn, Fran, Georges, and Floyd, and the spring-summer (2000) fires across the country.

While the U.S. emergency management infrastructure has responded admirably to these emergencies, participants at the sessions voiced the need for better coordination and planning of response activity. Another general sentiment expressed was the need for more local involvement and establishment of a proactive approach to emergency response management. Participants around the country also stated that they would like to see a faster response time to disasters and more general emergency preparedness.

Regional Concerns

Emergency response was consistently raised as a challenge at most listening sessions, but more often in Dallas, TX; Saint Louis, MO; Louisville, KY; Honolulu, Hawaii; and Sacramento, CA.

The participants' main focus was on water related emergencies. For example, in Dallas and Saint Louis the use of stream gauge readings to monitor potential flood emergencies was emphasized. Participants in Dallas indicated that government gauge funding was continually being pulled and was not being

Comments from the Listening Sessions

“Reduction of local, state, and Federal costs from flood disasters.”
State Government (DNR), Omaha Session

“Use preventative management approach to insure adequate water supply infrastructure during natural disasters.” *Honolulu Session*

“Update floodplain studies and maps to take into account flows from dam failures.” *Woburn Session*

“Too many agencies involved in stream gauge monitoring and lack of involvement of local people in stream gauge monitoring.” *St. Louis Session*

“Climate change could alter basic assumptions.” *St. Louis Session*

“Safeguard water quality with movement of hazardous material.”
Chicago Session

“Federal government should provide post flood recovery assistance so that people can work through regulatory process.” *Louisville Session*

“Address hazardous material spill/cleanup issues with regard to the Clean Water Act.” *Louisville Session*

supplemented by municipalities in many areas. Needed improvement in the efficiency of natural disaster response operations was also cited.

Saint Louis participants stressed the need for a centralized stream gauge operation for better monitoring and the standardization of gauge readings to Mean Sea Level (MSL) for public understanding. Other problems facing emergency response activities were identified as the lack of public involvement and an aging Coast Guard Fleet for navigation safety.

In Louisville, KY, catastrophic failures of navigation infrastructure and post flood recovery assistance were among the issues discussed. In addition, participants at this session lamented on the lack of emergency response on waterways. They cited the limited capabilities of regional resources to cleanup oil spills and other hazardous materials and the need for best management practices to handle such emergencies.

In Sacramento, the underlying theme in most emergency response comments was the need for a faster response time to disasters. For example, some participants at the Sacramen-

to session felt that the Corps has trouble finding funds to rapidly fix problems that develop after a disaster (in contrast to FEMA). This leads to costs being imposed on the local people. Meanwhile, local agencies cannot be responsive to emergencies if prior notification and authorization are required.

Honolulu participants emphasized a preventative management approach as a way of minimizing mitigation and rising costs in communities that experience habitual flooding. Ensuring adequate water supply was a special concern brought up at this regional listening session.

Americans say the Federal government should:

- Proactively prepare, coordinate and plan for natural disasters.
- Provide timely and efficient natural disaster response across Federal, state, and local agencies.
- Better balance water distribution between municipalities during droughts.
- Improve coordination across Federal agencies regarding disaster assistance programs.
- Issue general permits (404 permits – see Regulating Dredge and Fill Activities Challenge area) so that people can respond effectively and efficiently during emergencies.



Flooding exacts a heavy toll on people's lives and livelihoods.



Earthquakes may require long recovery periods.