

Stop and Think After the Flood

An editorial by French Wetmore, CFM in Steilacoom, Wash.



One theme heard in several committee meetings at ASFPM's 2013 conference was concern that residents, businesses, and local officials hurried to allow reconstruction after Hurricane Sandy. While there were some lights shining in the darkness, particularly former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg's call to build back smarter, most communities experienced the usual response to all disasters, "Let's get back to normal as quickly as possible." As we all know, "normal" often means leaving a community susceptible to damage from the next flood.

As floodplain management professionals, we were frustrated with this attitude, especially when it seemed to be shared by state and federal agencies that help communities after disasters. For example, the ASFPM Nonstructural Floodproofing Committee had offered to conduct workshops on how to protect damaged and reconstructed buildings after disasters. Such workshops were eventually funded and were conducted in June, more than seven months after Sandy hit. Workshop staff found that many buildings had already been repaired (mostly those not substantially damaged) and attendees asked, "Why didn't someone tell me this earlier?"

We know what steps to take in helping a community that wants to mitigate its exposure to damage from the next flood. There have been success stories of redeveloping areas prone to flooding when the leadership wanted to do it, had the time to do it, and when the resources were available. We can repeat these successes if we intervene in the normal process with two things:

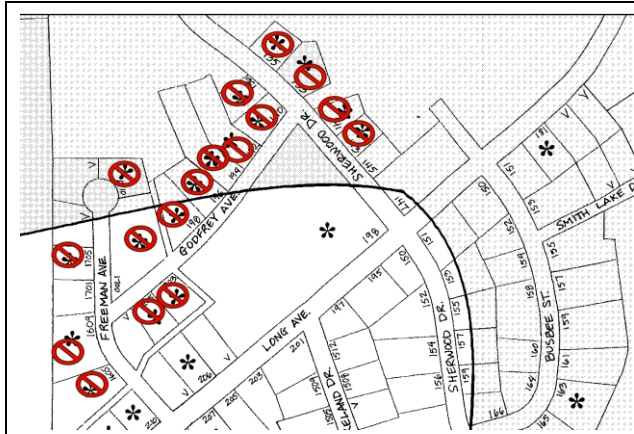
1. The message to, "Stop and think – you don't want to go through this again," and
2. Guidance on how to stop and think.

A key to success is a temporary reconstruction moratorium to buy some time to think. Moratoria have been used successfully, and Conway, S.C., highlighted below, is a great example of how community leaders can successfully implement moratoria to build back smarter.

ASFPM has [guidance](#) for the post-flood situation. The Natural Hazard Mitigation Association also developed simplified guidance after Sandy. View the nine-step process, including documents from Conway officials about their experience, [here](#).

Before you say, "Good, someone else is working on this," note that the national leaders who support this message cannot be everywhere, and certainly won't be on the scene when your community floods. Don't be a frustrated professional because you hoped someone else would remind your mayor or your citizens that they should stop and think before they promise a "return to normal."

You can clear out or retrofit more properties after a flood or other disasters in your floodplain, than at any other time. You can help those suffering from floods, help your community reduce flood losses, and accomplish more good floodplain management if you move quickly and convey the "stop and think" message to your local authorities. ASFPM, other professional organizations, and some federal and state mitigation agencies are behind you. Some have websites or resources to help you. But if you don't start it in your own backyard, who will?



Conway, South Carolina, passed a re-building moratorium to allow leaders and residents to stop and think before they rebuilt after being flooded by Hurricane Floyd in 1999. The city prepared a redevelopment plan within two weeks that identified areas and properties to be (1) cleared, (2) mitigated, or (3) reoccupied after cleanup.



This 2012 Google Earth® photo shows that 15 out of 17 parcels identified for clearance by Conway's interim mitigation plan have been acquired and cleared. There is more on Conway's process [here](#) and in ASFPM's upcoming NAI how-to guide on planning.

Updated Digital Maps Show Changes to Coastal Barrier Resources System in Five States



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a [notice in the Federal Register on April 17, 2014](#) (79 FR 21787), to announce the availability of final revised maps for all John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System units in Delaware, South Carolina (including one unit that crosses the state boundary into North Carolina), Texas and one unit in Florida. The revised maps are accessible via an online mapper at www.fws.gov/cbra/Maps/Mapper.html. Coastal Barrier Resources Act requires the Secretary of the Interior to review and edit the maps at least once every five years to reflect changes in coastal barriers from natural forces.

The updated maps were produced through a digital conversion project in partnership with FEMA. The service plans to complete digitally converted maps for units in Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New York City, North Carolina and Virginia by the end of this year. Updated maps for the entire system are scheduled to be completed by the end of 2016.