March 19, 2010

Dear Nightly News Staff:

March 16, 2010 you ran a “Fleecing of America” piece focused on flood insurance maps and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The majority of what made it on camera was “conversation” between your lead reporter - Mr. George Lewis, and a resident of Los Angeles affected by FEMA’s effort to modernize flood maps – Mr. Isaac Robinson. The “conversation” and commentary played well with your “Fleecing of America” focus. **What if you had chosen to make this piece a “Making the Difference” segment?**

We can all agree that **flooding is a problem!** There are social, economic, political and environmental impacts with every flood that result in loss of life, property and require redirecting local / state budgets from other priorities. Citizens expect “government” will act when problems become significant enough to affect their lives. “To make a difference,” over forty years ago the **National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) was created and given the mission of addressing the problems associated with flooding.**

The NFIP is a well-planned integrated mitigation program. It was designed with elements for preventing increased flood risk, correcting existing risk and helping people manage their own risk through insurance. There is a combination of strategies including: flood insurance; flood protection regulations; maps to identify the hazard areas that all work hand-in-hand to make people and property safer when floods happen.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency was created and given the authority to run the NFIP. FEMA has built capability not only in the federal agency, but in every state and many communities across the nation for effectively dealing with flood risk. FEMA implements the NFIP in the framework of cooperation with other federal, state and local agencies to map flood hazards across the nation and assist over 20,000 communities with managing the flood risk.

The agency applies science-based information and uses the latest technologies and hydrologic engineering practices for the federal flood insurance maps. There are quality and accuracy standards that every map must meet before it is printed. The local communities and
the public are invited to participate in the identification of the flood hazards and assessment of the risk. **FEMA has been sensible and responsible in their effort to assess flood risk and identify flood hazards.** I know how FEMA comes to conclusions on flood hazard identification, but your piece did not inform me of how Mr. Robinson or Mr. Lewis decided the maps are inaccurate.

Every professional working in the floodplain management area has heard the comments about map accuracy, mandatory flood insurance for federally backed mortgages and personal denial of flood risk. They spend entire careers developing skills and knowledge to help convey why and how the flood risk is managed as it is. **In fact, FEMA’s map modernization effort and continuing NFIP reform initiatives are the result of FEMA hearing and responding to comments from those impacted by flooding.**

**Does MSNBC hear the comments concerning how you could be “Making a Difference” when it comes to flooding?** I’m challenging you to become a responsible media leader and inform the public about how to use flood hazard mapping, understand its limitations, and manage personal flood risk with flood insurance. You missed an opportunity this time, but I am sure FEMA, the national Association of State Floodplain Managers or any of the 50 State Coordinators of the National Flood Insurance Program would be more than willing to assist you with “the rest of the story.”

Sincerely,

*Cynthia J. Crecelius*

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