

White House issues New Executive Order on Federal Flood Risk Management, ASFPM Supports New Standard

President Obama issued a new [Executive Order](#) Jan. 30 that proposes a new Federal Flood Risk Management Standard, which the Association of State Floodplain Managers says will ultimately help reduce flood losses and taxpayer costs.

Two federal coordinating groups that deal with floodplain management issues— Federal Interagency Floodplain Management Task Force and Mitigation Framework Leadership Group (MIT-FLG) – have been working on the new standard for the past year. The standard would apply to federal actions such as federal grants used for repair and redevelopment after a natural disaster.

“In the last 50 years, we as a nation have learned a lot about floodplain management and flood risk,” [ASFPM](#) Executive Director Chad Berginnis said. “The changing nature of flood risk, including increased risks due to sea level rise, demands competent standards that will withstand the test of time and the forces of nature. And we think the FFRMS is a great step in the right direction.”

Berginnis highlighted elements of the [draft guidelines](#) he thinks will benefit our nation the most in reducing flood losses and taxpayer-funded disaster costs:

The new standard incorporates a [freeboard](#), or an additional height above the national minimum standard, that represents a safety factor. Freeboard is one of the most common standards that more than half the nation has already adopted. It’s easy to do and reduces future flood insurance costs. A freeboard of 2 feet in general, and 3 feet for critical facilities, which is called for in the new standard, is reasonable and doable.

The new standard could be implemented by applying the freeboard or using science-based future conditions that consider changes in land use, climate change informed hydrology, or future sea level rise. Alternatively, the standard could be met by building to the 500-year (.2 percent annual chance) flood elevation.

We also know significant flood losses occur outside of the [FEMA](#)-mapped floodplain. Mother Nature simply does not recognize our flood mapping boundaries, and the FFRMS would require applying the freeboard when determining *where* the standard applies.

“The administration did not throw the baby out with the bathwater,” Berginnis said. “Rather, targeted updates to outdated standards will *supplement* current direction to federal agencies and should result in more resilient federal investments. ASFPM supports the administration’s efforts to develop a better FFRMS than we have now. To ignore the rising trends in flood damages - now exceeding \$10 billion per year - and stay with the status quo is to accept that it is better to repeatedly waste taxpayer money repairing flood-damaged facilities that are not resilient to future flood risks.”

The draft FFRMS implementing guidelines are on the FEMA website, and starting today, comments may be submitted via email over the next 60 days. See the White House Council on Environmental Quality’s [Fact Sheet](#) for those details.

ASFPM, a national association based in Madison, Wis., promotes education, policies, and activities that mitigate current and future losses, costs, and human suffering caused by flooding.

We've also created an FFRMS resource page, which you can see [here](#).