CHAPTER 8. PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Perhaps the most effective means of mitigating coastal hazards and protecting sensitive coastal environments is education through outreach. Education and outreach is needed to promote all other recommendations in this manual—to inform the general public, property owners, decision makers, design professionals, educators and developers about their community’s hazards (See Appendix C for a description of coastal hazards). It can be used to show people how to protect themselves, and help them understand the ways in which their actions could affect others.

Property owners, residents, and tourists need to be informed of their risk. In addition, community residents need to be provided the opportunity to raise concerns about potential adverse impacts that could be caused by proposed development. Flood, erosion, and vulnerability maps, storm damage surveys, and success stories are useful vehicles by which people come to understand coastal hazards and the ways in which their personal vulnerability can be minimized. Current or prospective coastal property owners should be provided with facts and recommendations about siting, design, and construction practices that will enhance their ability to build a structure that can withstand the forces of moving water and other hazards, without undermining the natural coastal processes, resources, or esthetic quality of the area.

NAI can be called an attitude or a mindset—do not cause an adverse impact on others. It is important that communities convey this message to the public, property owners, decision makers, design professionals, and developers. The fundamental message is “know your community’s hazards, learn how to protect against them, and understand that individual and collective actions could adversely affect others and the environment.” For example, property owners in subsidence areas should be advised to not build slab-on-grade structures. To help residents survive, they need to know safe places of refuge during a major disaster. Pre-storm preparedness and evacuation practice exercises can help identify education and outreach needs.

**BASIC: ANSWER QUESTIONS AND PROVIDE INFORMATION**

At a minimum, local officials answer inquiries about the flood, erosion, or other risk to properties and what regulations will apply when developing the property or recovering from a flood. Often when property owners are improving a structure that has been substantially damaged or are requesting a variance from the NFIP standards, they are unaware that they may be building a structure that will be at even greater risk. Nor do they realize that they may subsequently pay higher flood insurance premiums.

Communities make public documents available for review, such as the FIRM and past permit records.

**BETTER: COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

Local officials go beyond the basic level by making sure that property owners are periodically informed about coastal hazards, the vulnerability of their homes and property, mitigation techniques that will minimize vulnerability, and places to obtain pamphlets and other literature about hazards, mitigation, and the coastal environment. Many of these sorts of information are available in the offices of municipal or county (parish) floodplain administrators. Another source of information is the ASFPM Coastal Issues Committee web page, which can be
accessed via www.floods.org. It contains links to State and federal agencies and professional organizations that can provide information on coastal hazards and mitigation. In addition the NOAA Coastal Services Center offers information on erosion, subsidence, and links to other sources of data (http://www.csc.noaa.gov/rvat). The National Sea Grant website is another good source of State-specific information (http://www.seagrant.noaa.gov). (See Appendix E for websites that provide information on coastal hazards management.)

Additional CRS credit is available for communities who develop a public information strategy and make special effort to contact residents and property owners in the hazardous areas. To get this credit, communities collect or prepare fact sheets and case studies; hold special events like “flood awareness week;” give workshops to nonprofit organizations, professional associations, or the general public; or other similar activities. Additional information on the CRS program is obtained from the State NFIP coordinating agency or community floodplain administrator.

Community leaders plan and prepare for hazardous events before they occur to minimize the impacts and facilitate post-storm recovery. Local officials should increase their public information efforts after destructive storms when lessons are readily apparent and there is a “teachable moment”. This is an effective time to promote the benefits of building codes.

Communities show additional data and supplemental maps to complement and clarify the FIRM (e.g., with aerial photographs that show buildings) and depict information such as erosion rates, storm surge zones, historic inundation depths outside the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA), and areas where zoning and development regulations apply.

The community gains Community Rating System (CRS) points by using a newsletter or general mailing to notify community residents about the flood hazard and about flood insurance. Outreach projects include:

- Placing brochures in libraries, building supply outlets, convenience stores, or neighborhood hardware stores;
- Mailing notices to property owners in the SFHA or to everyone in the community (e.g. with tax or utility bills) after a disaster to help introduce the idea of floodproofing and identify sources of assistance;
- Locating displays with take-home materials in public buildings or shopping malls;
- Regularly writing articles for daily or weekly newspapers or free tabloids;
- Printing special sections in a newspaper;
- Offering presentations or workshops to neighborhood, civic or business groups;
- Placing information on community, agency, company, or association websites; and
- Promoting support for preservation of natural coastal areas.

**NAI LEVEL: EDUCATION**

Educational efforts are an NAI strategy because they work toward long-term transformation of people’s behavior and understanding about their coastal environment and its hazards and resources. These programs inform city officials and property owners about coastal hazards and responses to the hazards that create adverse impacts on others. NAI education efforts
are used to identify and explain mitigation measures that will reduce the likelihood that legal issues will arise. Educational materials on coastal processes and coastal hazards are available from some of the agencies with websites listed in Appendix E.

Outreach projects provide information to people to make them aware of the hazards and protection alternatives. Education and training can move the process one step further by fostering changes in attitudes and behaviors. Communities should start with their own staff, which then can pass on what they have learned. Working with schools to include coastal hazards in their curriculum can help build a strong foundation of hazard awareness in the community.

Classes offered by the Emergency Management Institute (http://www.training.fema.gov/EMIweb/) and the NOAA Coastal Services Center (http://www.csc.noaa.gov/bins/training.html) can help local government staff to better inform elected officials, the public, educators, real estate agents, insurance agents, and surveyors about ways to mitigate the impacts of coastal hazards. The National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERR) System is a network of 27 areas representing different biogeographic regions of the United States that are protected for long-term research, water-quality monitoring, education, and coastal stewardship. The NERR Coastal Training Program and your State coastal management agency outreach and education programs also provide training opportunities for community staff and local decision-makers.

The ASFPM administers the Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM®) program to ensure that floodplain management staff members at local, State, and federal levels are knowledgeable about reducing potential flood losses, and stay up-to-date on the NFIP and other flood programs. Information about the certification program, how to apply, and available training are on the ASFPM website (http://www.floods.org/).

One specific educational tool is the Coastal Construction Manual (FEMA, 2000a) prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). It can help designers, contractors, and community officials identify and evaluate practices that will improve the quality of construction and reduce the economic losses associated with coastal disasters. Copies of the manual are available from FEMA through its website (http://www.fema.gov/), and FEMA offers a training course on the Coastal Construction Manual in two forms: on-site at the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) in Emmitsburg, Maryland (a 5-day comprehensive course) and a 2–3 day “on the road” course tailored to specific communities.

FEMA has produced a series of fact sheets to provide technical guidance and recommendations concerning the construction of coastal residential buildings – Home Builders Guide to Coastal Construction (http://www.fema.gov/media/fact_sheets/mitigation.shtml). The fact sheets present information aimed at improving the performance of buildings subject to flood and wind forces in coastal environments. Photographs and drawings illustrate National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) regulatory requirements, the proper siting of coastal buildings, and recommended design and construction practices for building components, including structural connections, the building envelope, and utilities.

Communities using the NAI-level techniques organize more comprehensive education and outreach initiatives using the expertise of State and federal agencies such as NOAA Sea Grant, State Coastal Zone Management Programs, the National Estuary Research Reserves, the National Park Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Communities interested in doing
education and outreach can get support from their regional FEMA office, the State NFIP coordinator, the State Sea Grant program, and the State Coastal Zone Management Program. Staff from these offices may be able to help plan and conduct workshops, write articles for distribution to editors of local newspapers, and provide assistance with other outreach initiatives.

Disclosure of known flood, erosion, or other coastal hazard risks at the time of property transfer is an important educational effort consistent with an NAI attitude. Some States (such as Florida) have disclosure requirements. If a State requires disclosure for property in a flood or coastal hazard area, the seller is required to notify potential buyers of the risks and they can be factored into the purchase decision. If there is a shore protection structure on coastal property for sale, a State disclosure law could also require that prospective buyers be made aware of the issues surrounding such structures—their drawbacks, negative impacts, and the need for monitoring and maintenance. Educational literature from the agencies mentioned above can help sellers avoid transferring known adverse impacts that become unpleasant surprises to buyers.