

Plan Maintenance And Update Process

The Lorain County Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan will expire on _____, 2020. The process to update the plan will be ongoing throughout that five-year period, but the determination of how the updated plan will be completed should begin in early 2019.

Diligent mitigation plan maintenance lays a solid groundwork for the required update every five years, but often is difficult for counties to carry out for various reasons. When the county's plan is reviewed and needs, vulnerabilities, and outcomes are assessed along the way, a five-year update can theoretically be a fast and furious process. However, the plan is oftentimes placed on a shelf upon approval and not opened again until renewal deadlines loom. Lorain County fell victim to this after the 2007 approval and missed the 2012 update deadline, but wants to avoid this scenario altogether in 2020.

Lorain County, for several reasons, was not able to review its plan and document necessary changes after the 2007 plan was approved and until it expired in 2012. Staffing at the EMA office was minimal and demands were ever increasing with widespread economic growth and development in the metropolitan areas of the county. The county and its communities endured changes in leadership, and consistency was problematic. The economy crashed, throwing more work at fewer people. Storms hit, snow fell, winds blew, and utilities failed. Everyday work continued. The plan review meetings simply did not happen because these competing issues took precedence.

After the 2015 plan is approved, Lorain County will set and follow a schedule for regular review, update, and documentation of necessary additions, deletions, and changes for the next cycle of the plan update in 2020. As a matter of fact, in the process of determining why plan review did not occur between 2007 and 2014, Lorain County established corrective actions that will ensure the problem does not reoccur.

The challenges in regular update meetings included difficulty in holding meetings that were perceived as unnecessary (i.e. not "critical") by many stakeholders, competing demands on key staff members and local officials who are responsible for many different duties, and lack of consistency and long-range planning within EMA offices due to low staffing levels and ongoing emergencies demanding their immediate attention. Lorain County EMA has addressed all of these barriers in its plan maintenance strategy.

While face-to-face meetings have been the traditional means to collect and discuss disaster responses, catastrophic incidents, and storms, that methodology caused a failure to execute plan maintenance. The meetings were expensive to conduct, difficult to schedule, and limited in actual productivity. Because many stakeholder organizations managed staff time and cost very closely, workers were unable to attend meetings that covered collateral duties with indirect relevance to their job responsibilities. Busy schedules for employees with multiple responsibilities left little time for meetings even for those who could attend, leading to attendees leaving early and arriving late. Many times, a small EMA staff was overwhelmed with local responses and other planning demands and they had difficulty conducting meetings. Attendance decreased with each meeting that did occur and there was increasingly less motivation to adhere

to the plan maintenance schedule. Lastly, a combination of full-time officials in some jurisdictions who worked business-day schedules and other more rural areas where officials were volunteers who needed evening meetings made setting meetings almost impossible.

Solutions to these problems were developed as Lorain County created a non-traditional corrective action to those challenges. In today's business environment, alternatives to traditional meetings are preferred by most, and have been used enough to have garnered the acceptance of many workers. Conference calls and webinars allow workers to stay at their desks, saving travel time and expenses. Electronic surveys allow for input and feedback at the convenience of the worker. Electronic mail discussions follow a digital thread through many offices, and each person contributes thoughts and ideas at a time conveniently fit into other demands. These methods, perceived as more user-friendly in today's workplace, will be used to accomplish ongoing maintenance of the Lorain County Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan in the coming five years.

Responsibility for Plan Maintenance

With more contemporary communications methodology in mind, the EMA Director will provide the leadership and supervisory work to ensure the Lorain County Multijurisdictional Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan is kept current and FEMA-approved. The EMA will initiate and lead efforts to use a combination of digital and face-to-face methods during the coming five years as the mitigation plan is reviewed after incidents and annually.

Evaluation

The Hazard Mitigation Core Committee (HMCC) established for updating the plan at this time will continue to be called upon to evaluate and discuss the plan, on or about the anniversary of plan approval by FEMA. However, the maintenance discussions can be conducted electronically or in person at the discretion of the EMA Director. These information-gathering efforts will include evaluation of the past year's disaster incidents, the resulting damages and costs, and recovery efforts. It will include a status report on any mitigation projects in process, and will review the status of strategies developed by the county. The EMA Director will establish and maintain a record of these annual electronic discussions and/or face-to-face meetings.

In addition, each jurisdiction will be asked to review the mitigation plan strategies for their jurisdiction annually and submit a short report to the EMA Director with those findings. They will be asked to assess the incidents that have occurred in the past time period and summarize the damages and recovery efforts, as well as evaluate the mitigation strategies adopted and the status of each. If a strategy has been completed, the jurisdiction will evaluate its effectiveness at lessening losses. Each jurisdiction will be asked to review its strategies no less than annually with a report to be submitted to the EMA Director. The EMA Director will create and maintain a summary of these reports and findings.

In addition, the HMCC will have the option, at the direction of the EMA Director, to meet after any significant disaster or large scale emergency to review and document any changes, needs, additions, or deletions that should be considered at the five-year update. Any time a disaster is declared in Lorain County, it is suggested that the HMCC meet after the incident is closed to

review the plan with emphasis upon the strategies and the status of each. The EMA Director will establish and maintain records of these meetings and findings.

At each review point, the EMA Director should review the Hazard Assessment and Risk Analysis for completeness and accuracy; the Loss Estimates should be reviewed for ongoing accuracy and any significant development should be added to the lists. Key resources and critical facility lists should be reviewed for additions or deletions. The mitigation strategies, including goals, objectives, and tactics, should be reviewed for progress, status, continuation, and effectiveness. All findings should be recorded, reported to the HMCC, and saved for the 2020 update process.

Community Planning Efforts

While the plan maintenance process can be led and conducted by the EMA Director, validity and quality of the information is only as good as the participants make it. Therefore, it is intended that all entities and organizations involved in writing the update will participate in reviewing the plan. Without jurisdictional representatives and representatives from all the groups involved as the Core Committee, the ongoing input will not be comprehensive or accurate. Therefore, all parties involved in writing this update must look at annual review as critically important to the pre- and post-disaster welfare of Lorain County.

Public involvement is also an important component of ongoing mitigation planning efforts. To encourage public involvement in plan maintenance, notice of the annual plan review meeting will be announced through local print, radio, and television media and the general public invited to attend and provide input. These announcements will include the date, time, and location of the meeting. As with all meetings conducted during the mitigation planning process, annual update meetings will be open to the public and citizen input will be encouraged.

Documentation and Continuing Planning Efforts

The EMA Director will be responsible for maintaining records of all update communications. Those records should include the date, time, and attendance at review meetings or conferences, findings of each section review of the plan, and recommendations of the Core Committee for changes, additions, or deletions to the next cycled plan. Electronic mail and other communication should be saved for consideration, whether or not it is acted upon when received. These files can all be electronic so that they are easier to find and less cumbersome to maintain.

Lorain County will consider hazard mitigation communication an annual necessity. It will be scheduled, completed, and recorded in order to facilitate an expeditious update in 2020 with accurate and relevant information.

Lorain County will also consider mitigation planning a part of all other community planning and will strive to include the concerns and challenges of disaster in all other areas of such. The EMA Director will lead the efforts to integrate disaster preparedness and mitigation planning into economic development, land use planning, land use regulation, conservation, various response plans, and other specific organizational plans that are important to the daily operation of the county. Disaster mitigation will be promoted as a part of community development, etching its way into a comprehensive array of disciplines and interests.

Update Cycle

The Lorain County Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan will expire in 2020. With generous documentation and ongoing plan maintenance, efforts to update this plan should begin no later than late 2018. The EMA Director will assure that schedule is honored, and the update cycle is followed.