

SECTION 4: LOCAL MITIGATION PROGRAM COORDINATION

4.1 LOCAL CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT

OVERVIEW

The preparation of Local Hazard Mitigation Plans (LHMPs) is a precondition for receipt of Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant project funds under the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000), which also requires that states examine LHMPs as part of their State Hazard Mitigation Plan (SHMP) process. FEMA has established mitigation planning requirements for local jurisdictions to meet, among other things, to demonstrate that proposed mitigation actions are based on a sound planning process that accounts for the inherent risk and capabilities of the individual communities.

The Ohio EMA Mitigation Branch administers the LHMP Program for the state. The Mitigation Branch supports and assists local governments in the development and update of LHMPs. In early 2000's, a significant amount of federal and state funds were provided to develop LHMPs. For the time period spanning from the 2005 plan to the 2008 update, the main planning emphasis of the Mitigation Branch has been to get LHMPs reviewed, adopted, and FEMA approved. From 2008 to 2011, the emphasis shifted to tracking LHMPs progress and effectiveness in a quantitative way, and integrating plan information more significantly into the state plan. The focus during 2011-2018 was populating the State Hazard Analysis, Resource and Planning Portal (<https://sharpp.dps.ohio.gov/ohiosharpp>) with local plan information that enhances mitigation planning efforts statewide. In June of 2018, the Ohio EMA signed a Program Administration by State (PAS) Pilot Operational Agreement. This agreement allows the state to review and approve LHMPs and decrease the amount of time that LHMPs are in review.

Currently, Ohio has a very high LHMP participation rate. A county-by-county plan status report is included in Appendix D. As of December 2010, every county in the state of Ohio had developed a baseline mitigation plan that had been approved by FEMA. Based on an October 2018 report from FEMA, Region V 87.4% of the population of Ohio was situated in a community with a locally adopted, FEMA approved plan. As of October 2018, there are sixty-five county plans that are current and have final Federal approval. An additional two county plans (Franklin and Meigs) are federally approved pending adoption. Fifty-three counties are updating their plans under a federal grant, while six counties are developing their plans without a grant.

The Mitigation Branch has engaged in multiple outreach efforts to counties with expiring LHMPs to emphasize the importance of updating the plan, offer technical assistance, and identify possible funding sources for local mitigation plan updates. Fourteen LHMP updates were funded with PDM 16 funds, eighteen LHMP updates were funded with PDM 17 fund and nineteen plans will be funded under DR-4360. The Mitigation Branch will continue local mitigation plan outreach and technical assistance efforts during the next SOHMP update cycle.

SHARPP highlights local mitigation planning and project efforts. Providing greater public access to local mitigation plans will help publicize local strategies for reducing risk, and support requests for investment in mitigation projects. In addition to the benefits provided by SHARPP, the local mitigation planning capability has been enhanced by the Mitigation Branch's efforts to conduct statewide HAZUS version 4.2 runs for the 25- and 100-year recurrence intervals (see Section 2.2) and earthquakes. These HAZUS version 4.2 runs were made available to local officials for inclusion in LHMP updates. The Ohio EMA Mitigation Branch will continue to utilize HAZUS and promote the use of the tool throughout the state.

Local authority to implement a comprehensive hazard mitigation program is ample. Ultimately, it is up to each local jurisdiction to determine which mix of authorities, programs, policies, and capabilities it wants to develop. All Ohio communities (cities, villages, and counties) have the power to develop and adopt many different kinds of plans including comprehensive plans, capital improvement plans, economic development plans, emergency operations/response plans, continuity of operations plans, and hazard mitigation plans. Communities have regulatory powers to adopt zoning, subdivision, development, floodplain management and health codes. Ohio communities have the power to levy taxes / assessments for special purposes (including petition ditch projects, storm water utilities) and have the authority to borrow funds (bonding). Finally, communities have the authority to create planning, emergency management, health, public works, economic development and other needed agencies. All of these authorities have, or potentially could have, a bearing on local hazard mitigation.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF LHMPs

Because the Mitigation Branch has reviewed each LHMP, some trends were evident. Again, these trends are based on a qualitative, not quantitative review of the LHMPs.

OVERALL PLAN QUALITY

Overall, LHMPs involved many local agencies/entities and are of a good quality. It was noted that the quality of the plan is not dependent on its size; rather, it is the format and quality of information in the plan that is more important. Some of the best LHMPs are small to moderate sized. Ohio EMA recommends that jurisdictions use FEMA's planning how-to publications including the Local Mitigation Plan Review Guide, Local Mitigation Plan Review Tool, Mitigation Ideas: A Resource for Reducing Risk to Natural Hazards and the Local Mitigation Planning Handbook to guide the development of their plan.

One of the consistent issues across most, if not all, LHMPs is that the definitions used are not consistent. The areas where inconsistencies were most evident was in defining critical facilities, which seems to vary dependent on each jurisdiction's individual interpretation, building off of the definition within 44 CFR Part 201.6.

Another area of inconsistency was the way LHMPs conducted risk assessments and ranked the related hazard. There was a high level of variability in these processes, but variability in the risk assessment process and data sources used is not surprising given that communities have significantly different amounts and quality of data. In terms of ranking hazards, some LHMPs ranked the hazards based on a numerical ranking (using a matrix or scoring system), some developed a relative ranking system (one hazard ranked higher than another, but no number identified), and some developed a qualitative ranking system (ranking hazards as high, medium or low threat). However, flooding, severe summer storms, high winds/tornadoes, and severe winter storms were consistently ranked high or severe.

The final areas of inconsistency across the LHMPs is the manner in which hazards are grouped in the individual plans. Jurisdictions may choose to address each hazard separately or group similar hazards together, such as putting summer storms, hail and tornados together. The manner in which each hazard is addressed varies greatly depending upon the impacts to the local jurisdictions.

MITIGATION POLICIES, PROGRAMS & CAPABILITIES

Local mitigation policies and programs can be best understood by reviewing the local mitigation strategies. Those strategies should indicate whether policies or programs exist and need to be modified, or whether they exist at all. A few trends were noted.

It was evident that the majority of larger communities and counties have more extensive policies and programs in place versus smaller communities. Many of the local strategies pertaining to larger local governments tended to be geared towards refining or enhancing existing policies and programs versus creating them. The reverse was seen with smaller units of government. A similar trend was seen with local mitigation capability. Participants in the planning process for larger communities tended to be professional staff positions and/or multiple persons, while participants for smaller communities ranged from the mayor to council members to an appointed citizen.

Mitigation policies/programs/capabilities varied significantly from community to community and county to county. Some communities and counties had very sophisticated mitigation programs either demonstrated by the sophistication of their mitigation plans/goals/actions or the integration of mitigation programs. In addition, some communities developed their own, stand-alone plans. On the other end of the spectrum were communities that have virtually no involvement in hazard mitigation.

MITIGATION ACTIONS

While the mitigation actions in each LHMP can vary depending on the hazards and needs of each jurisdiction, there are several actions which occur in most if not all LHMPs. Education and outreach actions were the most frequently identified in LHMPs. Other actions that were frequently mentioned included flood mitigation projects (acquisitions/elevation, storm water), community and residential safe rooms, and warning systems (sirens/gages).

REGULATION OF OHIO DAMS AND EMERGENCY ACTION PLANS

Local Hazard Mitigation Plan completion requires the coordination of many entities. One component of the LHMP is dam and levee safety. As local officials update their LHMP, they will often reach out to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Water Resources, Dam Safety Program (DSP). The DSP is tasked with administering the Ohio Dam Safety Program to ensure that human life, health, and property are protected from dam and levee failures (see Section 2.6 for more detail). As part of administering the dam safety program, each dam regulated by DSP is required to have an Emergency Action Plan (EAP).

As part of an EAP for a Class I Dam (defined as dams that are greater than 60 feet tall, have a storage of more than 5,000 acre feet, or probable loss of human life in the event of failure), inundation studies are required to document what would be impacted by a potential dam failure. Undoubtedly, this information is invaluable for assisting emergency response efforts. However, developing inundation studies is the burden of the dam owner and can be quite costly. While there are some loan opportunities available to dam owners to complete inundation mapping, some owners simply do not have the means to complete these studies.

Most Class I dams do have an approved EAP, and DSP is working through voluntary compliance and the administrative enforcement program to achieve all Class I dams having approved EAPs with inundation maps. However, this goal will not happen overnight. Unfortunately, the State of Ohio does not have a comprehensive Geographic Information System (GIS) shapefile for all inundation areas for all the Class I dams with approved EAPs.

It should be noted that, per Ohio Revised Code 149.433(a) many of the documents associated with dams are considered security and infrastructure records and do not constitute a public record, therefore EAPs, especially inundation maps, cannot be distributed to unauthorized personnel due to security concerns.

While county Emergency Management Agencies and DSP are part of the official plan holders, they are unable to distribute, or publish, the inundation information.

Data management is another challenge when it comes to transmitting and updating EAPs. As DSP approves any EAP, these plans are then forwarded to the County Emergency Management Agency for their records. DSP also retains a copy of the EAP. Over the past several years, DSP has also been collecting pdf versions of the EAPs. However, with over 1,500 regulated dams, there is constant maintenance needed as owners' change, classification sometimes changes, dams are breached and abandoned, and new dams are built.

Dam failure is a low probability, high consequence event. When ranking items for a local hazard mitigation plan or for the DSP, it is a complex method that requires some basic dam safety engineering understanding. Please see section 4.4 for a detailed approach for prioritizing funding for dams within the State of Ohio and Section 2.6 for more details about dam safety risk assessment. As the High Hazard Potential Dam Grant (HHPD) develops, more education and outreach will be required for local EMA directors regarding prioritization and safety of dams.