

Tropical Storm Allison Recovery Project

PART II – MAP MODERNIZATION OUTREACH APPROACH



CASE CONCENTRATION

Harris County Texas and FEMA partner to assist residents in recovery from Tropical Storm Allison and minimize future flood loss by developing accurate flood hazard information.

PROJECT SCOPE

In early June 2001, Tropical Storm Allison ravaged 28 counties in Texas, including many areas of densely populated Harris County, which includes the City of Houston. Widespread flooding caused approximately \$5 billion in damage in the Houston area. FEMA and the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD), working under a Cooperating Technical Partner (CTP) agreement, engaged in a rapid restudy of the entire county, including approximately 1,200 stream miles in 22 HCFCD-specified watersheds.

The Tropical Storm Allison Recovery Project (TSARP), a partnership between HCFCD and FEMA, included an outreach plan for the flood study process. The TSARP Team (including FEMA and HCFCD) developed technical products to help the communities recover from the devastating flooding and provide a greater understanding of flooding and flood risks.

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Allison impacted every one of Harris County's 35 communities. The

TSARP Team implemented a two-way communication strategy in its outreach plan. All 35 communities were notified and invited to participate in the mapping project. An introductory briefing was held at the onset of the project for floodplain administrators. Communities also participated through frequent meetings with the TSARP Team. Several advisory committees further encouraged continual public involvement.

The Executive Committee included the City of Houston Mayor's office, political liaisons, and executive level staff. The TSARP Team solicited input from this committee on suggested objectives.

The Technical Committee included engineers, surveyors, technical personnel, and organizations, and individuals from a local university. The Committee's goal was to share, assess, analyze technical data, and disseminate this information.

The Users Group included stakeholders directly affected by products, such as floodplain administrators. The Group's goal was to seek advice from and educate the stakeholders to ensure that end products were user-friendly.

The Stakeholders Committee included members of the general public. The TSARP Team encouraged supporters and dissenters to attend. Invitations were sent to several organizations representative of various ethnicities, homeowners associations, environmental groups, property development groups, insurance

BEST PRACTICES FOLLOWED & DEVELOPED

TSARP staff sought assistance
from stakeholder communities



impacted by the flood
mapping roll-out
and discussed
best practices to:
effectively rollout

the maps and reach and assist low-
income communities.

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POLLING

The TSARP Team polled citizens about mapping and re-mapping. The poll was unique in that it sought to educate respondents while gathering feedback. About 500 homeowners were called, and interviews were extensive—about 20 minutes long—which provided incredible feedback. Eighty-two percent of the people supported the effort at the end of the interview, while 4% opposed it for one reason or another. The poll found that people in Harris County knew that it was prone to flooding and were interested in having accurate information about flood hazards. The poll showed the public thought that “risk assessment” information is important. At first, citizens questioned the use of extensive resources for the massive mapping endeavor. The pollster educated them about the value of today’s technology in contrast to the technology available 20 years ago. People soon understood and supported the idea that updated, more accurate maps would help HCFCF reduce the risk of future flooding.

agent associations, mortgage brokers and bankers, local universities, and included ethnically diverse participants.

The TSARP Team worked to ensure that the general public, technical users, and all stakeholder groups were made aware of the project status on a quarterly basis (at a minimum) and were included in every step of the study process. The efforts to inform and engage the public, technical experts, and local officials were designed to gather accurate, relevant information; to keep the stakeholders informed; and to ensure acceptance of the maps, when released.

OUTREACH TOOLS

- **Web Site Development:** The TSARP Web site contains products available to the general public, such as TSARP presentations and reports, as well as educational resources and guidance documents. The TSARP Web site was regularly referenced during stakeholder meetings and presentations.
- **Publications:** The Tropical Storm Allison Public Report, “Off The Charts,” was published one year after the flood and was distributed to the general public. The local newspaper, The Houston Chronicle, agreed to distribute 380,000 copies of the report as an insert to subscribers. The TSARP Team also worked with a large local grocery store chain to distribute “Off the Charts.” Additionally, the TSARP Team distributed this publication and other outreach documents in Spanish.

- **The HCFCF Communication Department** personally visited every community within Harris County. The visits included city council meetings and other agency meetings, as well as “one on one” meetings at city and local government offices.
- **A Public Outreach Consultant** was hired to lead media public relations. This was important because Houston residents understood flooding but did not have an understanding of flood maps and associated regulations.
- **Messages:** The TSARP Team designed present, clear, and concise messages customized for specific audiences.
- **Training:** The TSARP Team worked with local National Flood Insurance Program staff to develop training courses for insurance agents. The TSARP Team assembled broad coalitions to sponsor training courses.
- **Press Releases:** The ultimate goal was to distribute and gain acceptance of the maps. The outreach staff provided the basis for numerous stories to the Houston Chronicle.
- **Presentations:** The HCFCF actively pursued and responded to requests to present information on TSARP. The TSARP Team made presentations a priority to build support. Presentations were made to civic organizations, real estate groups, homeowners associations, business and environmental groups throughout the county.