

Chapter 1

Background and Purposes of the Plan

1.1 About the Plan

The Jefferson County, Alabama, Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan is a multi-jurisdictional guide for all communities that have participated in the preparation of this plan through the Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee (HMPC). It fulfills the requirements of the Federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) as administered by the Alabama Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region IV.

Adoption of this plan assures continuing eligibility for FEMA grant assistance to participating localities, including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program (PDM), the Flood Mitigation Assistance Program (FMA), and other Federal funding programs.

Start date for the Jefferson County, Alabama, Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan was January 2003. The AEMA awarded a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Planning Grant for the plan in December 2002. This effort is an update of the Jefferson County Local Mitigation Strategy, published in 2001, prior to enforcement of the DMA 2000 planning requirements. The 2001 strategy is a comprehensive plan that addresses all human-caused as well as natural hazards affecting Jefferson County. The findings and results of that strategic planning process are, to the furthest possible extent, preserved in this plan. However, this current plan enlarges the scope of the previous effort, especially by its emphasis on an open and participatory planning process and adoption by participating localities. The final results of the combined planning processes are evidence of the commitment of the Jefferson County EMA Council to a comprehensive and effective mitigation planning program with proven successes.

1.2 Scope

The scope of the Jefferson County, Alabama, Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan is the unincorporated and incorporated areas within the county. The plan addresses all natural hazards deemed to threaten property and persons within Jefferson County. Both short-term and long-term hazard mitigation strategies are addressed, and implementation tasks are assigned, with funding alternatives identified.

In addition to this chapter, the plan contains the following elements:

1. A profile of the County's geography, history, physical features, and socioeconomic characteristics (Chapter 2. County Profile).
2. A description of the planning process that opens participation to all local governments, the public, academia, businesses, non-profit agencies, and regional, state, and federal governments (Chapter 3. The Planning Process).

3. A general assessment of the County’s past and predicted exposure to natural hazards and the risks that it faces, including impact on buildings, critical facilities and infrastructure with loss estimates (Chapter 4. Risk Assessment).
4. An assessment of local governments’ capabilities to implement hazard mitigation policies and the long-range vision, goals, objectives, and mitigation measures set forth to effectively mitigate the County’s natural hazards risks (Chapter 5. Mitigation Strategies).
5. The short-range (5-year) mitigation action programs for each participating jurisdiction (Chapter 6. Community Mitigation Action Programs).
6. Procedures for maintaining an active and effective, long-range hazard mitigation planning and implementation program (Chapter 7. Plan Maintenance).

1.3 Authority

Section 409 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Public Law 93-288, as amended), Title 44 CFR, as amended by Section 102 of DMA 2000 provides the framework for state and local governments to evaluate and mitigate all hazards as a condition of receiving Federal disaster assistance. A major requirement of the law is the development of a local hazard mitigation plan.

1.4 Funding

Funding for the Jefferson County, Alabama, Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan was provided by a 75 percent Pre-Disaster Mitigation Planning Grant from FEMA, through the Alabama Emergency Management Agency (AEMA). The local share, 25 percent, was provided by in-kind services documented by the Jefferson County EMA.

Federal share	75 %	\$15,000
Local share	25%	\$ 5,000
Total cost		\$20,000

Additional funding support for this plan was provided by a FEMA Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) grant to the Jefferson County Commission to fund a flood mitigation plan for Jefferson County and all municipalities except for the City of Birmingham. The City of Birmingham was awarded a FMA grant for a flood mitigation plan within its jurisdictional limits. Funding for NFIP sanctioned cities was provided through in-kind services performed by Jefferson County's Land Development Department.

1.5 Purposes

Hazard mitigation is any action taken to permanently reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and their property from the effects of hazards. These natural hazards can be of any type - tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, severe storms, winter freezes, wildfires, droughts, landslides, land subsidence, earthquakes or dam failures – resulting from natural disaster crises. The communities within the county can take steps to prepare and implement

mitigation measures for almost any type of hazard that may threaten its citizens, businesses and institutions.

Hazard mitigation plans can identify a range of structural approaches to lower the costs of future disasters by meeting the unique needs of the community. For example, structural mitigation projects for flooding could involve modifying a stream channel to increase the conveyance of floodwaters or retarding the flow rate by the construction of detention facilities.

Mitigation strategies can also involve non-structural initiatives, such as educational programs to inform the community about the risks the public and its property face in order to encourage them to purchase insurance or retrofit their homes. Non-structural programs can also include developing and enforcing regulations to prevent construction in hazard areas, or to ensure that development that does occur will be resistant to the hazards threatening the area.

Mitigation programs and projects serve to lessen a community's vulnerability to the hardships and costs of disasters. The implementation of mitigation programs is a key component to achieving a sustainable community, one in which the economic and social needs of people, businesses, and institutions coexist with natural environmental constraints and are protected from the disruptions and impacts of emergencies and disasters. Hazard mitigation planning must be closely coordinated with a community's overall planning and development efforts. The most effective way for a community to initiate this objective is through a comprehensive local mitigation planning program. Comprehensive planning can provide Jefferson County citizens a safe, healthy and prosperous place to live and work.

The purpose of the Jefferson County, Alabama, Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan is to develop a unified approach among its local governments for dealing with identified hazards and hazard management problems. This plan serves as a guide for local governments in their ongoing efforts to reduce vulnerability to the impacts produced by natural hazards.

Further, the plan seeks to accomplish the following additional purposes:

- Establish an ongoing hazard mitigation planning program;
- Identify and assess the hazards that pose a threat to life and property;
- Evaluate additional mitigation measures that should be undertaken; and
- Outline procedures for monitoring the implementation of mitigation strategies.

This plan provides guidance for local mitigation activities over the next five-year planning cycle. It encourages activities that are most effective and appropriate for mitigating the effects of all natural hazards.