



## Council on Environmental Quality

# FACT SHEET: Taking Action to Protect Communities and Reduce the Cost of Future Flood Disasters

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### FACT SHEET: Taking Action to Protect Communities and Reduce the Cost of Future Flood Disasters

Across the country, extreme weather and other impacts of climate change are threatening the health, safety, and prosperity of our communities. This month, NOAA and NASA [announced](#) that 2014 was the hottest global year on record. And as the planet continues to warm, impacts like rising sea levels, intensified storms, and heavy downpours are contributing to an increased risk of flooding. President Obama is committed to ensuring that American communities thrive in the face of a changing climate. That is why, today, the President signed an Executive Order establishing a flood standard that will reduce the risk and cost of future flood disasters by requiring all Federal investments in and affecting floodplains to meet higher flood risk standards. By requiring that Federally funded buildings, roads and other infrastructure are constructed to better withstand the impacts of flooding, the President's action will support the thousands of communities that have strengthened their local floodplain management codes and standards, and will help ensure Federal projects last as long as intended.

This new Federal Flood Risk Management Standard, [called for](#) by the President's State, Local and Tribal Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience, builds on the unprecedented actions President Obama has taken to support communities as they prepare for the impacts of climate change. Agencies will have flexibility in implementing the new Standard and will incorporate input from the public and stakeholders as they move forward, including through a series of public listening sessions across the country. This week, the Army Corps of Engineers [released](#) a comprehensive study that evaluates flood risks to the coastal areas affected by Hurricane Sandy and provides a framework to help communities address increasing flood risks. The study, which was called for by Congress, emphasizes the importance of improved planning, and notes that managing coastal storm risk is a shared responsibility by all levels of government. The Administration has made significant investments in resilient disaster recovery in the wake of devastating storms like Hurricane Sandy to ensure that infrastructure projects factor in climate impacts like rising sea levels, and to invest in making transit systems more resilient to flooding and extreme weather.

#### Flood Impacts on Communities

Floods leave behind big costs for communities and taxpayers. Between 1980 and 2013, the United States suffered more than \$260 billion in flood-related damages. Recent examples include record flooding from excessive rainfall in central and northern Illinois in April 2013 that damaged homes and businesses and caused an estimated \$1 billion in losses. And damages from Hurricane Sandy in 2012 – when high wind and coastal storm surge devastated the Northeast – are estimated at \$67 billion, with recovery efforts still ongoing.

More than 50 percent of Americans live in coastal counties, where key infrastructure and evacuation routes are increasingly vulnerable to impacts like higher sea levels, storm surges, and flooding. And according to the National Climate Assessment, more than \$1 trillion of property and structures in the U.S. are at risk of inundation from sea level rise of two feet above current sea level – an elevation that could be reached as early as 2050. That further jeopardizes the critical infrastructure Americans depend on every day for housing, transportation, energy, water supply, and more.

### **Protecting Communities and Reducing the Cost of Flood Disasters**

In 2013, the President's Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force adopted a higher flood standard for the Sandy-affected region to ensure that Federally funded buildings, roads and other projects were rebuilt stronger to withstand future storms. The strengthened standard is similar to flood risk standards in place in the States of New York and New Jersey. The Sandy Task Force also recommended that the Federal Government create a national flood risk standard for Federally funded projects beyond the Sandy-affected region. In the President's Climate Action Plan, he followed through on this recommendation by directing agencies to update their flood-risk reduction standard to ensure that federally funded projects across the country last as long as they are intended. Over the past year, Federal agencies collaborated on this update. The new standard announced today gives agencies the flexibility to select one of three approaches for establishing the flood elevation and hazard area they use in siting, design, and construction. They can:

- Use data and methods informed by best-available, actionable climate science;
- Build two feet above the 100-year (1%-annual-chance) flood elevation for standard projects, and three feet above for critical buildings like hospitals and evacuation centers; or
- Build to the 500-year (0.2%-annual-chance) flood elevation.

To protect their homes, businesses and vital infrastructure from disasters, at least 350 communities across the country – ranging from Dallas and Nashville to Denver and Tulsa –and the States of Indiana, Montana, New York and Wisconsin have already adopted standards that either meet or exceed this new Federal standard. The Administration today is also releasing proposed guidelines – which will be available for 60 days of public comment -- that when finalized will provide guidance to agencies on implementing the new standard. Once public input has been considered, including from a series of public listening sessions that will be held across the country, and the guidelines are finalized, agencies will implement the Standard through their own rulemaking or other procedures, which also will incorporate input from the public and stakeholders.

The new flood standard will apply when Federal funds are used to build, or significantly retrofit or repair, structures and facilities in and around floodplains to ensure that those structures are resilient, safer, and long-lasting. It will not affect the standards or rates of the National Flood Insurance Program. Each agency will carefully consider how to appropriately apply this standard, and consider robust public input before deciding how to implement it.

To read the Executive Order, click [here](#).

To read the flood-risk reduction standard, click [here](#).