

Albany Dougherty Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan

Chapter 1 – Introduction

I. Purpose and Need (Executive Summary)

Disasters caused by natural, man-made or technological hazards have become increasingly costly, not only for the disaster victims but also for all taxpayers. During the last decade, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) estimates that financial losses caused by disasters in the United States total tens of billions of dollars each year. The cost of a major disaster to our community goes well beyond those damages that are directly sustained. Recovery from disasters requires resources to be diverted from other important public and private programs, and adversely impacts the productivity of our workforce. The magnitudes of these losses are most appropriately considered at local, rather than national levels. As the costs of disasters continue to rise, it becomes more and more evident that pre-disaster steps or strategy must be taken to reduce the damage and destruction to our community. This strategy is known as mitigation.

Building a disaster resistant community is an initiative that challenges Dougherty County. Reducing the effects of disasters makes economic sense, and it is good public policy because it protects our citizens and our future. This hazard mitigation plan is being developed in hopes of limiting these losses to individuals, families, businesses, and taxpayers, and seeks to: 1) assess natural and manmade risks; 2) identify specific mitigation actions to help reduce identified risks; 3) foster collaborative partnerships and community relationships between business owners, citizens, and the media; and 4) increase public awareness of and support for related initiatives.

The Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Plan was produced through a Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) PDM Planning Grant and the joint efforts of the Albany Dougherty Pre-Disaster Mitigation Committee. This plan is required to make the County eligible for federal and state public assistance funds in the event of an emergency situation.

The Plan identifies activities that can be undertaken by both the public and the private sectors to reduce safety hazards, health hazards, and property damage caused by natural, technological or man-made hazards, and outlines activities that can be implemented to reduce or eliminate exposure to all twelve natural hazards that could impact Southwest Georgia. The following chapters and appendices to the plan cover hazard identification and analyze; an assessment of the County's risk assessment and vulnerability to natural hazards; and an assessment of the County's capability to address natural hazards that influence hazard mitigation planning. The essence of the plan is contained in Chapters 4 and 5 Mitigation Goals and Objectives, which outlines activities that can be implemented to reduce or eliminate exposure to natural hazards. The emphasis of the strategies section is on reducing exposure to flood, drought, tornados and hazardous materials damages. While these are not the only hazards within

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Dougherty County, they were identified as those hazards most likely to impact the greatest number of citizens and the greatest land area.

Additionally, flooding is also the only natural hazard where the area of impact can be predicted given the rainfall or severe weather event and the characteristics of the drainage basin. Thus, flood damage prevention has the most potential to reduce citizen exposure to natural hazards.

Community Profile

Located in Southwest Georgia, Dougherty County was created December 15, 1853 from Baker County as Georgia's 103rd county. Portions of Worth County were later added to Dougherty County in 1854 and 1856. The County seat is Albany, founded in 1836 and incorporated on December 27, 1838. According to the year 2000 census figures, the population of Dougherty County is 96,065, and Albany is 76,939.

The County covers approximately 336 square miles and has a population density of 286 persons per square mile. While much of the land area in the County is classified as rich agricultural land, most of the population, about 80%, is located in the urban area concentrated in the County seat, Albany.

The County is bisected by the Flint River, running north to south, dividing Albany into eastern and western parts. A significant part of the City lies in the floodplain of the Flint River. The floodplain is highly developed with commercial, industrial, and residential land uses, including public facilities.

Authority

In the past, federal legislation has provided funding for disaster relief, recovery, and some hazard mitigation planning. The Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Program was authorized by the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Assistance and Emergency Relief Act (Stafford Act), 42 USC, as amended by the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. The Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) is the latest legislation to improve this planning process and was put into motion on October 10, 2000, when the President signed the Act (Public Law 106-390). The new legislation reinforces the importance of mitigation planning and emphasizes planning for disasters before they occur. As such, this Act establishes a pre-disaster hazard mitigation program and new requirements for the national Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). Section 322 of the Act specifically addresses mitigation planning at the state and local levels.

Statement of the Problem

Since 1994, the Dougherty County has experienced two Presidential Disaster Declarations and numerous emergencies. Hapless, poorly planned development or a lack of disaster recovery resources can exacerbate our community's susceptibility to natural and man-made hazards.

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In order to develop a dynamic plan for managing hazard risk in Dougherty County we need to develop a model that educates the public regarding hazard mitigation, incorporates hazard mitigation into the development planning process, and continue to update the hazard mitigation planning process and seek funding for emerging needs.

Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of this plan is to fulfill Dougherty County's hazard mitigation plan requirements, and facilitate implementation of hazard mitigation management activities through an action plan. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) defines hazard mitigation as "any sustained action taken to reduce long-term risk to human life and property from natural hazards." An effective plan will improve the County's ability to deal with disasters and will document valuable local knowledge on the most efficient and effective ways to reduce losses. Preparing a plan to lessen the impact of a disaster before it happens will provide the following benefits to the County:

- Reduced public and private damage costs.
- Reduced social, emotional, and economic disruption.
- Better access to funding sources for mitigation projects.
- Improved ability to implement post-disaster recovery projects.
- Public Awareness.

Mitigation is the ongoing effort to lessen the impact of natural disasters on people and property. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has designated mitigation as the cornerstone of emergency management. Albany Dougherty County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) also believes that the best response to natural disaster is to prevent or diminish its impact before it occurs. Mitigation begins with local communities assessing their risks and repetitive problems and making a plan for creating solutions to these problems and reducing the vulnerability of its citizens and property to risk. There are a variety of mitigation measures. They are organized under six general strategies:

- Structural control projects – e.g., wind design speed, levees, bridge improvements
- Property protection – e.g., relocation out of harm's way, retrofitting buildings, insurance
- Preventive – e.g., zoning, building codes, safe rooms, and other development regulations
- Emergency services – e.g., warning, sandbagging, evacuation
- Natural resource protection – e.g., wetlands protection, urban forestry programs
- Public information – e.g., outreach projects, technical assistance to property owners

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Through the application of mitigation technologies and practices, we can ensure that fewer County citizens become victims of natural/technological disasters. For example, mitigation measures can be applied to strengthen your home, so that your family and belongings are better protected from floods, fires, earthquakes, wind damage, and other natural hazards. They can be utilized to help business and industry avoid damages to their facilities and remain operational in the face of catastrophe. Mitigation technologies can be used to strengthen hospitals, fire stations, and other critical service facilities so that they can remain operational or reopen more quickly after an event. In addition, mitigation measures can help reduce disaster losses and suffering so that there is less demand for money and resources in the aftermath. The end result of Mitigation is a reduction in the cost of natural, technological or man-made disaster response and recovery to each individual Dougherty County taxpayer; and also in the losses suffered by each homeowner in the event of a natural or man-made disaster.

In practice, mitigation can take many forms. It can involve actions such as:

- Promoting sound land use planning based on known hazards.
- Buying flood insurance to protect your home and belongings.
- Relocating or elevating structures out of the floodplains.
- Developing, adopting, and enforcing effective building codes and standards.
- Engineering roads to carry a 25-year and bridges a 100-year event without damage
- Using fire-retardant materials in new construction; and
- Developing and implementing a plan in your business or community to reduce your susceptibility to identified hazards.