Breaking the Disaster Cycle: Future Directions in Natural Hazard Mitigation

Implementing Mitigation at the State Level; Sustainable Hazard Mitigation Criteria

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Objectives:

8.1 Understand the context for state hazard mitigation plans and programs, including the importance of natural disasters as focusing events.

8.2 Review the performance of state hazard mitigation planning under the Stafford Act.

8.3 Review lessons learned from assessments of state hazard mitigation plans, in terms of the potential for achieving sustainable communities.
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- Objectives:

  8.4 Identify the obstacles to achieving the balance sought by sustainable development.

  8.5 Participate in an exercise to develop sustainability criteria for evaluation of state hazard mitigation plans.
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Objective 8.1

Describe the context for state hazard mitigation plans and programs, including the importance of natural disasters as focusing events:

- Low public priority except in times of crisis
- Significant natural disasters focus government and public attention on hazard mitigation *after the fact*
- Difficult to galvanize public before disasters strike
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The Northridge Earthquake increased public awareness of fault line hazards in Southern California after the fact (Source: FEMA)
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Figure 8.1 Context for State Hazard Mitigation Planning

- Absent a crisis, state hazard mitigation planning is:
  - Viewed as a technical, rather than a policy, matter
  - Low salience issue for elected officials
  - Unsupported by citizen pressure groups
  - Lacking in staff & organizational resources
  - Forced to rely on federal (FEMA) standards & funding
  - A "policy without a public"
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Figure 8.2 Windows of Opportunity

- Disasters can be seen as "focusing events" that elevate hazard mitigation to the top of the public policy agenda
- Focusing events:
  - Sudden, relatively rare events
  - Happen with little or no warning
  - May impact many of people in area or community
  - Known to policy makers & public at same time
  - Create strategic advantage for change-oriented groups
  - Bring state new funding & technical resources
  - Can lead to stronger hazard mitigation plans & policies
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Devastating floods in Texas served as a “focusing event”
(Source: FEMA)

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Objective 8.2

- Review the performance of state hazard mitigation planning under the Stafford Act:
  - Lackluster history
  - Federal disaster policy based on post-disaster recovery
  - Eligibility for federal disaster assistance funds based on post-disaster plans
  - Checklist attitude toward hazard mitigation plans not related to expenditure of HMGP funds
  - Lack of commitment by state and local government officials to pre-disaster hazard mitigation
  - Lack of capacity in hazard mitigation staff and resources
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FEMA provides training for state and local officials. (Source: FEMA)
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Objective 8.3

- Review lessons learned from assessments of state hazard mitigation plans, in terms of the potential for achieving sustainable communities:
  
  • Maintain and enhance environmental quality.
  • Maintain and enhance people’s quality of life.
  • Foster local resiliency to, and responsibility for, disasters.
  • Recognize that sustainable, vital local economies are essential.
  • Identify and ensure inter- and intra-generational equity.
  • Adopt a consensus-building approach, starting at the local level.
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Seagulls on a Patuxent River Beach (Source: NOAA)
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Objective 8.4

Identify the obstacles to achieving the balance sought by sustainable development:

- Private property rights groups oppose governmental regulations
- Local governments think only about impacts of their decisions on themselves
- Hazard mitigation is viewed as a technical process
- Specialization is viewed as road to success in our economic system
- Poor and future generations are not involved in public policy making
- Consensus-building must contend with competition, individualism, and majority-rule
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- Objective 8.5

  - Participate in an exercise to develop sustainability criteria for evaluation of state hazard mitigation plans:
    - Develop no more than 15 criteria
    - Provide rationale for each criterion
    - Apply criteria to 2000 Oregon Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan
Figure 8.3 Oregon Natural Hazards Plan (Source: Oregon Department of Emergency Management)