

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the five years since the Lehigh Valley updated its Hazard Mitigation Plan, there hasn't been the kind of devastating floods that forced hundreds of people from their homes and businesses like the ones in 2004, 2005 and 2006. Or the kind of 80 mile per hour winds that left nearly 200,000 structures without power for days after Hurricane Sandy hit in 2012.

However, the lessons learned during those events and countless others in the history of this region now help us take steps to prepare before the next disaster hits.

The Lehigh Valley drafted hazard mitigation plans in 2006 and 2013, and federal regulation requires that plans be updated every five years, but perhaps more importantly, the effects of climate and cultural changes, and emerging hazards require that we evolve our methods of preparing for disaster.

The *Lehigh Valley Hazard Mitigation Plan* reflects that evolution.

**Both counties
and all 62
Lehigh Valley
municipalities
agreed to
participate in
the Plan.**

**Together,
they've
proposed
1,161 actions
designed
to lessen
the impact
of future
hazards.**

The Plan still addresses the 22 natural and non-natural hazards that were covered in the previous plan. Hurricanes, sinkholes, winter storms and drought remain serious risks, and flooding is still the number one threat to communities across the region. However, three new hazards have been added to combat changes in a region that is growing in population by more than 5,000 residents per year. Like much of the nation, the Lehigh Valley is dealing with a drug overdose crisis that claimed the lives of 193 Lehigh Valley residents in 2016. Therefore, the new Drug Overdose Crisis hazard includes actions designed to save lives and prevent addiction.

Invasive Species was added as a hazard to help people deal with the growing damage caused by the arrival of the Spotted Lanternfly, Emerald Ash Borer, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, Gypsy Moth and Asian Tiger Mosquito.

Pandemic and Infectious Disease was also added as a hazard for the first time. Thousands of people who fled to the Lehigh Valley from hurricane-ravaged Puerto Rico last fall prompted us to consider population evacuation strategies in hazards where it applies.

The goals of this Plan reach to the core of the life and death struggles that accompany most disasters. They include minimizing the risk to life and property, enhancing the resiliency benefits of our natural resources, improving planning and emergency response to protect public health and safety, raising public awareness, and promoting hazard avoidance, particularly in floodplains.

MITIGATION GOALS

- 1. To minimize the risk to human life associated with natural and non-natural hazards.**
- 2. To promote hazard avoidance, especially in floodplains.**
- 3. To reduce the damages and functional loss from natural and non-natural hazards to existing and future public and private assets, including structures, critical facilities and infrastructure.**
- 4. To preserve and enhance the effectiveness of natural resources, including woodlands, streams, rivers, wetlands, floodplains and riparian buffers to provide resiliency benefits.**
- 5. To develop, prioritize and implement cost-effective, long-term actions that will reduce the impacts of natural and non-natural hazards.**
- 6. To improve local regulations to reduce the impacts of natural and non-natural hazards.**
- 7. To enhance planning and emergency response efforts among federal, state, county and local emergency management personnel to protect public health and safety.**
- 8. To promote public awareness on both the potential impacts of natural and non-natural hazards and actions to reduce those impacts.**

Hazard mitigation priorities for the region moving forward include:

- Integrating hazard mitigation into municipal and county plans, especially related to infrastructure and capital improvement programs.
- Identifying hazard mitigation project funding opportunities and giving communities the tools to compete for it.
- Improving outreach to the public and business community.
- Helping municipalities implement the Community Rating System designed to lower their flood insurance costs.
- Committing to annual monitoring and updating of the Plan to ensure its effectiveness.

Keeping that focus is important, not only for the obvious reasons of helping to insulate residents from the pain that comes from natural and non-natural hazards, but because, for local communities to have access to federal hazard mitigation funding, they have to both participate in and adopt the Plan.

The months since the Plan kick-off meeting have revealed the kind of teamwork needed to cover a 726-square-mile region with a diverse topography that includes mountains and waterways that wrap around a robust transportation

network and a population of 659,312 people. All 62 municipalities agreed to participate, all 62 municipalities offered data used to build the plan, and together they've devised more than 1,000 actions designed to protect the community. Every city, borough and township has designed strategies to prepare for rising waters in a region that includes 71 miles of rivers and 1,000 miles of streams.

In the coming years, this Plan will allow municipalities to apply for federal aid to relocate or remove homes and businesses that have been repeatedly flooded. They'll be eligible to apply for grants to buy back-up generators to keep essential services running during emergencies, and virtually all communities are proposing actions to enhance education and community outreach.

In the coming months, every municipality in the region will be asked to adopt this Plan, and every year they'll be expected to make progress on the many actions they've proposed to help protect their residents. Fighting the impacts of hurricanes, floods and drug overdose isn't something we can do by thinking about it every five years. This Plan's purpose is to make hazard mitigation planning part of every community's everyday routine.

In the end, it is everyone's shared responsibility—from municipal leaders to emergency management professionals to private developers and citizens—to implement the Plan to save lives, property and the environment.