

Communicating Flood Risk

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Questions for the Group...

Are you aware that we are in a hurricane season?

Do you know the flood risk at this location?
Perdido Beach Resort

Do you know your flood risk at home?



Flood Risk Awareness

34%

of RiskMAP Communities are aware¹ of their flood risk



23%

of non-Risk MAP Communities are aware of their flood risk

12%

of RiskMAP Communities are aware² of flood risk to their residence



8%

of non-Risk MAP Communities are aware of flood risk to their residence



FEMA

MITIGATION ACTIVITIES FREQUENTLY TAKEN BY THE PUBLIC



Raised furnace or water heater

48%



Bought flood insurance

23%



Sealed basement walls

26%

Everyone is at risk

Floods can happen almost anywhere. They are not limited to coastal areas or to devastating tropical storms – they happen more often and in more locations than you many realize.

Floods are the most common disaster in the US.

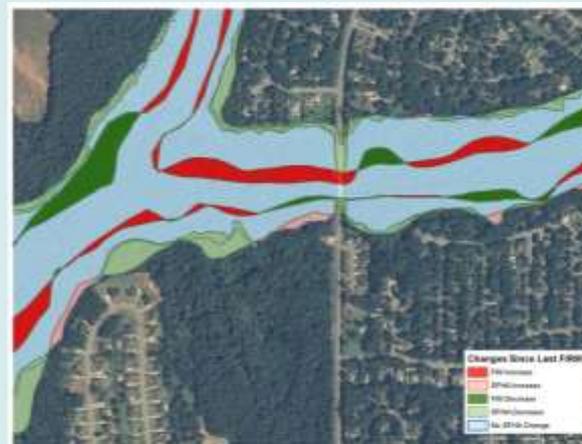
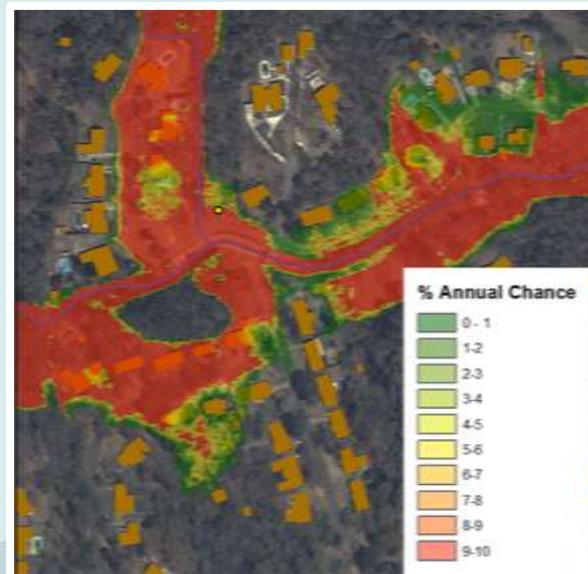


What is your flood risk?
www.adeca.alabama.gov/floods

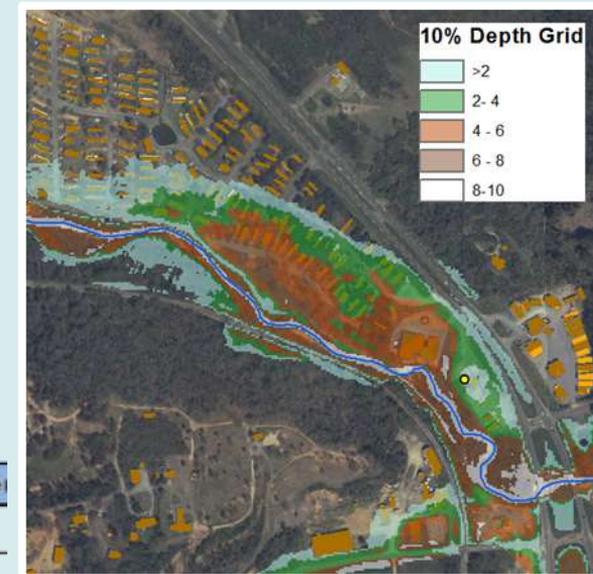
How do we communicate flood risk?

In communications, one size does not fit all

- End goal of message
Helping communities determine and invest in mitigation actions that result in more resilient communities
- Who, what, where, why
- Science and data are subsidiary



Area of Interest	Total Area (mi ²)	Increase (mi ²)	Decrease (mi ²)	Net Change
Area within SFHA*	146.3	31.8	46.1	-14.4
Area within Floodway*	11.4	6.5	0.2	6.3



What are the uncertainty challenges?

- Mapping data are the result of quality engineering studies, but “the lines on the map” do not represent where it will and will not flood.
- If you are “out” of the SFHA, it does not mean that you won’t flood. It only means that you are not legally required to purchase flood insurance.
- Mapping data will never be perfect. Science is evolving; variations in modeling techniques don’t mean that data is “wrong.” Investing more time, energy and money to obtain greater fidelity in the maps won’t lead to community willingness to engage in mitigation.



What do people want to know?

- How will this affect me?
- How much is it going to cost me?
- Do the “experts” know what they are doing?
- What are “the experts” not telling me?



What do people not want to know?

- Their own responsibilities
- Decisions made now may negatively impact them in the long run
- What is best for them may not be best for the community
- Uncertainty exists in all data



How do we become more resilient?

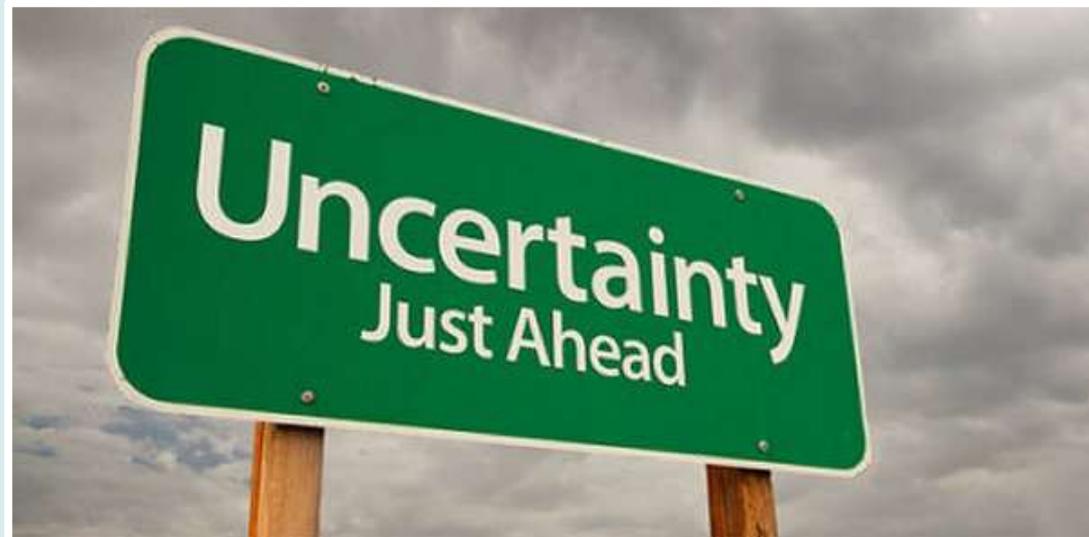
Communities and residents must come to terms with their flood risk:

- what is known
- what can never be known
- what they should do anyway



Building Trust

- Express empathy
- Be competent
- Openness and honesty
- Demonstrate commitment
- Be willing to engage in discussion
- Acknowledge people's feelings



The Uncertainty Dilemma

Solution A: Acknowledge uncertainty

Name the uncertainty and acknowledge that no one is comfortable with uncertainty. Follow it up with what is known and how you know it and what can be done as next steps.

Solution B: Avoid over-reassuring or being overly confident

Use the “what we know” and “what we don’t know” layering technique to keep people with you.

Solution C: Share dilemmas

Smart decisions are not always obvious and many times are a shared responsibility.

Solution D: Remember that people will simplify complex information in their minds



Conclusion

- Effective risk communication is more than “messaging.”
- The ‘experts’ may not be the best communicators
- Trust needs to be earned and sustained over time
- Uncertainty on the details is not an excuse for ignoring the need to become more resilient to flood
- It is a shared responsibility to become resilient



