

I INTRODUCTION

Since 1955, fifty-six Presidential and Gubernatorial disasters have been declared in Luzerne County ranging from floods, severe winter storms, droughts, fires, and most recently, pandemic. These and other natural and human-made hazards have led to costly response and recovery efforts in the County. Hazard Mitigation is defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as “sustained action taken to reduce and eliminate long-term risk to people and property from hazards and their effects”. Hazard mitigation planning is considered essential to breaking the disaster cycle of damage.

As population increases, industry shifts, technology advances, and climate changes, the list of hazards to which the County is at risk is evolving. Luzerne County Department of Planning & Zoning and Luzerne County Emergency Management Agency have taken an all-hazards approach to hazard mitigation planning. A great deal of mitigation has been accomplished since the last Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) Update in 2014/2015.

Mitigation Progress Highlights

- Reduction of the number of properties in flood high hazard area through voluntary acquisition and buy-out programs.
- Rehabilitation and repair of dams.
- Enhancement of building and development permitting and inspection processes.

These successes, among others, have been considered and incorporated into the development of the 2020 Luzerne County HMP Update. This update was a collaborative effort by the Luzerne County Hazard Mitigation

Planning Team. Community leaders, agency and organizational stakeholders, and the general public, were invited to participate in the HMP Update process.

PLANNING PROCESS

This Luzerne County 2020 HMP was originally developed in 2009 and then updated in 2014/2015. The 2009, 2014/2015, and 2020 Luzerne County HMPs represent the work of government officials, business leaders, community members and non-profit organizations in developing a blueprint for protecting community assets, preserving the economic viability of the community, and saving lives.

The input required to guide the HMP update process was collected through a variety of in-person and virtual coordination with stakeholders. Through a collaborative approach to integrate mitigation planning efforts across local agencies, the 2020 HMP update is able to address a diverse set of hazards. After exhaustive outreach, sixty-seven of seventy-six municipalities participated in the planning process.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Assessing and ranking hazards helps communities set goals and priorities for mitigation based on their vulnerabilities. Based on previous plan updates, stakeholder input, research, data collection, and information from the Pennsylvania Hazard Mitigation Plan, 18 hazards were profiled in the 2020 HMP. Hazard profiles include information on location, magnitude, past and future occurrence, and vulnerability of each hazard including potential loss estimates. All hazards identified in the 2014/2015 HMP were expanded on in the 2020 HMP. Increased vulnerability from the impacts of Climate Change has been considered and

incorporated into the 2020 HMP particularly with regard to drought, flood, and hurricane severity. Four new hazard profiles were added to the 2020 HMP: Cyber-Terrorism, Hailstorms, Levee Failure, and Opioid Addiction. Of the 18 hazards profiled, the three highest-risk hazards include flooding, winter storm, and drought.



More than **10,000 people** in the County live in a flood high hazard area.



In 2017, one winter storm deposited over **30 inches** of snow at once.



An estimated **\$17.8M** in agricultural products are vulnerable to prolonged drought.

CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT

Assessing community capabilities helps to determine the ability of the County and its municipalities to implement a comprehensive mitigation strategy, and to identify potential opportunities for establishing or enhancing specific mitigation policies, programs, and projects.

The assessment has two primary components: an inventory of relevant plans, laws, regulations, policies and programs already in place, and an analysis of capacity to carry them out. These mitigation capabilities include laws and regulations; funding and technical assistance; development and construction management; and planning and programmatic support.

MITIGATION STRATEGY

The Mitigation Strategy serves as the blueprint for reducing or eliminating hazard vulnerabilities. The basis for the Mitigation Strategy is the following five mitigation goals:

1. Protect lives, property, and resources in Luzerne County.
2. Promote sustainable development to improve the quality of life in Luzerne County.
3. Promote public understanding, support, and implementation in mitigation related activities.
4. Ensure adequacy and continuity of emergency management services during hazard events.
5. Ensure hazard mitigation goals and objectives are consistent with goals of other plans and ordinances in the county and municipalities.

These goals are supported by 21 objectives and 191 mitigation actions, which are detailed in the 2020 HMP.

Mitigation actions can be categorized into four main types of mitigation techniques including 1) plans and regulations, 2) structure and infrastructure projects, 3) natural systems protection, and 4) education and awareness programs.

"All of us - from individuals, to families, to businesses and institutions, to governments - must be responsible to protect the lives and property of those who depend on us from whatever emergencies may arise. By their very nature, emergencies are chaotic. A planning process will reduce this chaos and ensure that we can provide that protection." Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency
