

January 23, 2007

MEMORANDUM FOR: County Judges, Mayors, and Emergency Management Coordinators

FROM: Project Managers Dr. Ken Tobin, Texas A&M International University
and Len Materman, Rio Grande Institute

SUBJECT: Next Steps on “*Cover the Border*” Hazard Mitigation Plan for the Rio Grande Border Region

The purpose of this letter is to inform you on progress, next steps and the role you can play to have your jurisdiction well-positioned in the Plan.

The regional Hazard Mitigation Plan is being drafted as a series of blueprints for the future adopted by local governments. On both a local and regional basis the plan will set forth concrete actions for reducing potential loss of life and property from the full range of natural and man-made disasters, streamlining actions for the post-disaster recovery process, and capturing needed (but often elusive) funding that will become available from FEMA, DEM and others.

Background: Some of you are newly elected or recently appointed, so here is some background. Thirteen counties and the local jurisdictions within them have been invited to participate in this voluntary planning effort: Brooks, Cameron, Duval, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Kenedy, McMullen, Pecos, Reeves, Starr, Terrell, Webb and Willacy. They were selected because they do not as yet have a FEMA/DEM-approved pre-disaster mitigation plan in place.

To help each city and county come into compliance with government requirements, the Governor’s Division of Emergency Management has provided mitigation planning funds to our institutions for execution of this project on a regional basis. As a participating jurisdiction, you will be able to maintain eligibility for future Federal funding that is restricted to communities that have committed to a plan.

The specifics of what we put into the plan for your communities will come from each of you through what you develop with technical assistance from experts brought together by H2O Partners, Inc. of Austin, and is approved for formal submission by your city or county governing body. We anticipate addressing a number of regional, cross-jurisdictional hazards and mitigation opportunities, as well as those you identify locally, but they too will be shaped by those who live and work in the border communities and wish to be included in the Plan.

If a jurisdiction does not provide input, we cannot submit its plans for approval by DEM and FEMA, so please read carefully about the next steps you will need to take and the support we can provide you.

Current status

We have created a project website with current information on the planning process and various tools and resources, including outreach materials in both English and Spanish. The web address is:

www.CoverTheBorder.net

We have completed twelve Kickoff Meetings, Mitigation Workshops and Public Meetings.

Meeting	Region	Location	Date
Kickoff meeting	Upper border	Ft. Stockton, Pecos	April 10, 2006
Kickoff meeting	Middle border	Laredo	May 31, 2006
Kickoff meeting	Lower border	Rio Grande City	June 1, 2006
Kickoff meeting	Lower Rio Grande Valley	Padre Island	August 21, 2006
Mitigation workshop	Upper border	Ft. Stockton	November 14, 2006
Mitigation workshop	Middle border	Laredo	September 11, 2006
Mitigation workshop	Lower border	Rio Grande City	September 12, 2006
Mitigation workshop	Lower Rio Grande Valley	Weslaco	December 7, 2006
Public meeting	Upper border	Ft. Stockton	November 14, 2006
Public meeting	Middle border	Laredo	September 11, 2006
Public meeting	Lower border	Rio Grande City	September 12, 2006
Public meeting	Lower Rio Grande Valley	Weslaco	December 7, 2006

We have also:

- developed a preliminary draft risk assessment and presented it at the workshops for your review and comment to ensure that it reflects local conditions. We welcome further comment and urge those who have not seen the material or commented to do so now. You can see it on the internet at www.CoverTheBorder.net Once you are on the website, click on the tab on the left titled “Risk Assessment.” If you have problems getting access contact Ken Tobin ASAP at 956-326-2417.
- prepared County-wide maps of individual hazards, which you can download from the same project website for future use
- provided workshop participants a Hazard Survey Form to use to obtain feedback from the public on hazards of concern and their recommendations for how to mitigate future risk. If you need more forms please download them from the website or contact us.

We are currently gathering information from participating jurisdictions to complete:

- The Capability Assessment Survey Forms provided at the workshops; and
- Proposed Mitigation forms outlining actions to reduce the impact of future hazards.

These are to be provided in coordination with your Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC) or the person your jurisdiction has selected as the point of contact for the project.

Next steps

For your jurisdiction to be included in the plan, we will need two things – which we can help you complete – by **February 9, 2007**:

- If you have not done so already, please complete the attached Capability Assessment survey form (Attachment 1). This form collects background information on your current mitigation activities in the areas of floodplain management, fire protection, and land use and other planning. The State requires that this information be included in your plan.
- Based on the preliminary risk assessment results listed on our website and discussed at our Mitigation Workshops, please identify mitigation actions that can be undertaken by your jurisdiction using the attached form (Attachment 2). We will need a minimum of three proposed mitigation actions from each jurisdiction, focused on the hazards identified by your jurisdiction as “high” or “medium risk.”

These materials should be forwarded by mail or e-mail to the Rio Grande Institute at the address below.

Katharine C. Fain
Rio Grande Institute
P.O. Box 183
Marathon, Texas 79842
Cell phone: 512-632-0644
Email: katefain@riogrande.org

Should you have any questions, please contact Len Materman, Executive Director of the Rio Grande Institute, at 650-867-7768 or by email at len@riogrande.org. The material you submit will provide the basis for drafting the preliminary language of a plan for your community. That initial draft will be posted on the project website for review and comment by interested parties before it is revised and finalized.

Public Involvement

Input during the drafting stage. Public involvement in the planning process is important, which is why we conducted public meetings in four locations. Over the next few months as the plan is drafted, we encourage you to distribute the Hazards Survey of the Public (Attachment 3) and brief your jurisdiction's governing body (Commissioners' Court or City Council) on the plan. During the governing body meeting, the public should be given an opportunity to comment on the plan. Once the draft plan is posted on the project website, arrangements must be made for the public to review a copy of the draft plan and submit comments prior to its adoption. Attachment 4 contains sample agenda items for your consideration and use at your governing body's meeting.

City Council/Commissioners' Court review and adoption.

The Plan this project produces will be reviewed by the State Governor's Division of Emergency Management and approved by FEMA's Regional office in Texas. We will submit a preliminary plan to the State and FEMA for review and comment, then work with you on needed revisions and make certain all State and Federal requirements have been met.

Working through DEM's Austin office, our H2O experts will first submit the overall plan (including your portion) to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for conditional approval. Once that is in hand, your jurisdiction's governing body must formally adopt the Plan. That approval is essential for your jurisdiction to receive final approval and be eligible for the full range of Federal mitigation assistance.

As this process unfolds, please retain copies of agenda items and public notices. They will become part of the official record of the planning process and will be used to demonstrate public involvement to the State and FEMA.

Attachment 4 contains a sample "adoption resolution". The fully executed resolution with signatures should be sent to the Rio Grande Institute, Attn: Katharine Fain at PO Box 183, Marathon, TX 79842.

Timeline

Timelines for taking your Plan to the final phase follow. Please read carefully and incorporate these milestones into your work calendar.

Brooks, Duval, Jim Hogg, Kenedy, McMullen, Pecos, Reeves, Starr, Terrell and Webb Counties

Date	Activity
January 31, 2007	Capability Assessments and initial list of mitigation actions due
March 1, 2007	Draft plan posted on project website for jurisdictional review and comment
March 15, 2007	Comments due on draft plan
April 1, 2007	Revised plan posted on project website
May 1, 2007	Submit draft plan to State and FEMA for review

Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy Counties

Date	Activity
February 9, 2007	Capability Assessments and list of mitigation actions due
April 15, 2007	Draft plan posted on project website for jurisdictional review and comment
May 15, 2007	Comments due on draft plan
June 15, 2007	Revised plan posted on project website
September 15, 2007	Submit draft plan to State and FEMA for review

Points of Contact

For further information, please visit our website or contact Len Materman, Rio Grande Institute, at len@riogrande.org or at 650-867-7768. Technical support is available by contacting Laurel C. Lacy, H2O Partners, Inc. at 512-261-0705 or by email at LaurelLacy@aol.com.

We want to thank all who came to last year's meetings and workshops, as well as those who are new to this planning process and are working diligently to catch up. We are inspired by the hard work that has gone into your efforts to protect lives and property and hope this planning process will build on that to improve your prospects for securing assistance to do even more.

Attachments: 1 – Capability Assessment survey form
2 – Mitigation Action form
3 – Hazard Survey of the Public
4 – Sample agenda item and adoption resolution

cc: Emergency Management Coordinators
Governor's Division of Emergency Management
Regional Liaison Officials