

MEDIA RELEASE

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NJ Municipalities Struggle to Prepare for Future Flood Risks

NJ Resiliency Network releases results of Post-Sandy Municipal Needs Assessment

Ewing, NJ (March 12, 2015) – The [NJ Resiliency Network](#) released today the results of a Post-Sandy Municipal Needs Assessment. Many New Jersey municipalities have struggled to take adequate steps to fully evaluate their potential risk and vulnerability to future sea level rise and storm surge, a problem that could potentially have devastating consequences.

The lack of planning to address future flood risks was just one of several key findings that indicate municipalities are not yet ready for the next extreme storm event. Eighty-seven municipalities in the coastal and Super storm Sandy impacted regions of New Jersey supplied data for the needs assessment through interviews and a detailed survey.

The assessment results detail a number of challenges that municipalities continue to face to be more resilient including help with risk and vulnerability assessments, a lack of clarity about what constitutes an adequate effort to identify future risk, ongoing need for technical expertise on zoning and new ordinance to mitigate flooding impacts, and a need for funding to harden local infrastructure public buildings and improve the resilience of local energy systems.

“While many of the survey responses echoed previously voiced concerns about the lack of funding for planning initiatives and flood mitigation projects, the more surprising responses were about risk assessments and the inconsistent progress municipalities have made to identify vulnerabilities to future storms and flooding,” said Linda Weber, program director for the NJ Resiliency Network.

When asked to self-assess the extent that towns had identified future risks, over 75 percent of the respondents felt that their municipality had adequately assessed the risks and pivoted to begin taking steps to address those risks. However, an assessment of the progress municipalities have made shows that the vast majority have not taken adequate steps. The results highlight a lack of standards or clear guidance on what constitutes an adequate assessment with many municipalities doing “assessments” that do not consider the impacts of future flood risks such as sea level rise and hurricane storm surge. Current assessments also vary widely in terms of the level of detail they provide, leaving many critical assets unassessed.

“The confusion about whether a town has adequately assessed its vulnerabilities and risks is understandable given the relatively new terrain of climate adaptation and disaster recovery in New Jersey, but not acceptable” said Randall Solomon, co-director of Sustainable Jersey. “The planning tools for long-term recovery and resiliency are unfamiliar to most local officials and professionals, and the community of experts and resource organizations is still getting organized. And while many municipalities are taking steps towards recovery from Sandy, most still fall short of understanding future threats in a way that can be acted on. They need help.”

Currently there are no standards or generally accepted guidance for doing a vulnerability assessment, and no consistent source of funding or regulatory requirement that can help and incentivize municipalities to move forward. Numerous entities are working to develop new tools and technical assistance, like the Resilient Coastal Communities Initiative led by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection’s Office of Coastal and Land Use Planning, which includes several academic and non-profit partners developing resiliency tools and providing technical assistance to coastal and tidal communities. Other programs are planned or are in the works, but most are inadequately funded to move all New Jersey municipalities forward.

To read a summary of the Post-Sandy Municipal Needs Assessment results visit: <http://www.njresiliency.com/about/post-sandy-municipal-needs-assessment/>