

Chapter 18

Safety

A. OVERVIEW

West Virginians are slowly beginning to change their opinions of public safety. The inclusion of a safety component in the state enabling legislation for a comprehensive plan is evidence that safety is gaining rank as an issue that requires stronger consideration by municipalities. Our experiences are leading us to the understanding that our past policies lacked mitigation efforts because they were based on reactionary measures, and were neither efficient nor effective. For example prior to the National Flood Insurance Program most communities took the recover, repair and rebuild approach to flooding. This approach had a tendency to perpetuate damage and loss because the repaired and rebuilt buildings were rarely relocated, and remained on flood prone property, only to be damaged or destroyed during the following flood event.

Even though natural hazards present a greater risk due to their high frequency of occurrence, man-made hazards must also be identified and managed. The potential for a chemical spill or house fire is as prevalent as a catastrophic storm. Recent events have also raised public awareness of the possibility of intentional man-made hazards.

However through the planning process and with proper legislation and enforcement, communities can work to avoid disasters and mitigate the effects of hazards that cannot be avoided.

B. GOALS AND ACTIONS

Goal: To respond to community needs with professional personnel committed to safeguarding the health, safety and general welfare of our community.

Actions:

- Create a community that is safe from both natural and man-made disasters through the hazard mitigation planning process.
- Create a sustainable community that, through proper management of resources, and the location of development, infrastructure, public facilities is resistant to the effects of natural and man-made hazards.
- Build lasting partnerships among agencies and individuals that provide expertise in the hazard mitigation planning process so that plans are created, monitored and updated.
- Improve public awareness of the importance of public safety and hazard mitigation.

C. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The City of Fairmont provides a full range of municipal services to its citizens via professional Police, Fire, Public Works, Engineering, Water and Sewer, Building Inspection / Code Enforcement, and Planning Departments. Each department plays a role in the overall safety and welfare of the residents of Fairmont.

The Police and Fire departments are the primary responders to disasters. They will both eventually be headquartered in a new Public Safety Building on Quincy Street which will be a major improvement over their current head quarters. Both departments currently cooperate with other agencies in different jurisdictions through mutual aid agreements. Dispatch for both departments is handled through Marion County 911, which is the central dispatch for all Law Enforcement and Fire/ Rescue for Marion County. All communication is planned to be centralized, and operated on a regional basis. The City of Fairmont operates a primary response rescue squad, however EMS services are provided by the Marion County Rescue Squad and Jan-Care, which is a privately operated service provider.

Engineering, Public Works, and Water and Sewer Departments are responsible for maintaining and repairing city infrastructure all of which is vital during a disaster situation. For example Public Works is tasked with snow removal from city streets during winter storms. The importance of the Water and Sewer Department cannot be overlooked because; the need for clean, safe water is exacerbated during times of crisis.

The Planning Department is responsible for recommending ordinances and policies for adoption by City Council that will improve public health, safety and general welfare of the residents of Fairmont. Code Enforcement, and Building Inspection are responsible for enforcing the ordinances and policies. The City currently enforces a Floodplain Management Ordinance as required by the National Flood Insurance Program, along with a Zoning Ordinance, The West Virginia State Building Code, The 2000 International Code Council Building Code, The 2000 I.C.C. Property Maintenance Code the NFPA Life Safety Code as measures to provide safety to residents and protect properties in Fairmont.

There are other entities within the corporate boundaries of Fairmont that are involved in protecting the public health and safety, and should be invited to participate in future hazard mitigation and emergency response planning efforts. Fairmont General Hospital provides emergency medical services. Marion County Health Department provides vaccinations and other preventative medical services for county residents. The local Chapter of the American Red Cross of course maintains the local blood supply and also provides recovery and post disaster services.

The City of Fairmont participated in the development and has adopted a Multi Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan for Marion County. This plan was mandated by the Sate Office of Emergency Services as a prerequisite for participation in the State Flood Mitigation Assistance Program. The planning process was facilitated by the Marion County Local Emergency Planning Commission, and was prepared by R.D. Zande and Associates, Inc. The Assessment portion of the plan reveals that the City of Fairmont is susceptible to the following Natural Hazards:

1. Flooding- Some portions of Fairmont are located in the 100 year Floodplain as determined by FEMA's Flood Insurance Study for the City of Fairmont as revised October 18, 1995

2. Winter Storm/Sleet – Fairmont has suffered severe winter storm events as late as 1996, and 2003.
3. Severe Thunderstorm- Thunderstorms occur with some regularity in Fairmont. They will cause some flooding, and high winds.
4. Hailstorms- Hail will sometimes accompany wind storms and thunderstorms.
5. Wind Storms- High winds tend to accompany thunderstorms in Fairmont.
6. Landslide and Erosion – Fairmont has a significant amount of development on steep slopes, which contributes to the risk of landslide.
7. Drought – Fairmont frequently experiences drought conditions.
8. Temperature Extreme /Heat Wave – Heat waves occur during summer months that effect our aging population, and people with existing health conditions.

D. BASIC ISSUES

1. Most of the industries that could cause a large hazmat spill or gas leak are no longer located inside the city limits. However there are still active rail lines within the city, and tanker trucks traveling Interstate 79, and the city streets pose a potential risk for hazmat spills.
2. There is no Emergency Response Plan for the City of Fairmont that would set the logistics of a large-scale event. Such a plan would cover evacuation routes, emergency shelter locations, chain of command, protocol for coordination with the local hospitals and clinics, utility plant security for water and sewer, coordination with private utilities, emergency access routes, public information officers and coordinated public notification efforts.
3. There is no detailed inventory of City owned property or facilities. Such an inventory would be extremely useful for disaster planning purposes, as well as recovery purposes. It would allow planners to locate necessary infrastructure, such as, possible shelter locations. It would also assist them in the calculation of lost resources during post disaster recovery.
4. The Marion County Multi Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan was developed for natural disasters only. Additional study and assessment is needed in order to develop a Hazard Mitigation Plan that addresses man-made hazards.
5. Fairmont has three rivers within its boundaries. This presents the potential for certain hazardous circumstances. Riverspills could affect the local raw water source for the filtration plant. The use of the rivers for recreational boating creates potentially hazardous situations that require specialized personnel, training and equipment for the proper response measures.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Short Range (2005-2008)**

- a. Form committee for the purpose of developing a Hazard Mitigation Plan specific to man-made hazards and to undertake the planning process.
- b. Form committee for the purpose of developing an Emergency Response Plan that is specific to the needs of the City of Fairmont for both natural and man-made hazards.
- c. Review existing ordinances and policies to their effectiveness for making Fairmont a sustainable community.
- d. Continue public education programs that inform the public of natural and man made hazards as well as provide mitigation practices.

2. Medium Range (2008-2011)

- a. Undertake planning process for the creation of a Natural and Man-made Emergency Response Plan.
- b. Continue to update and enforce ordinances and policies that protect the public health safety and general welfare of the residents of Fairmont.
- c. Continue to review and assess needs for capital outlay for equipment, and supplies to allow Police, Fire, Public Works and Utilities Departments to operate effectively.

3. Long Range (2011-2015)

- a. Continue to monitor and update Hazard Mitigation Plans and Emergency Response Plans.
- b. Continue public education programs that inform the public of natural and man-made hazards as well as mitigation practices.
- c. Continue to update and enforce ordinances and policies that protect the public health safety and general welfare of the residents of Fairmont.
- d. Continue to review and assess needs for capital outlay for equipment, and supplies to allow Police, Fire, Public Works and Utilities Departments to operate effectively