

# SUMMARY – Long-Term Disaster Recovery Planning by Cities and Counties in the San Francisco Bay Area

## Background ...

The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) conducted a survey of Bay Area cities and counties in the region to assess the status of long-term disaster recovery planning by those local governments. Long-term recovery refers to the repair and rebuilding process that will need to be undertaken by government departments such as planning, finance, housing, public works/building, redevelopment, and emergency management to start restoring their community after an earthquake or other catastrophic disaster. The results of the survey provide an assessment of what long-term disaster recovery plans are and are not in place in Bay Area jurisdictions.

While hazard mitigation is essential to minimize the damage of disasters to communities, having a comprehensive plan for the long process of recovery is often overlooked. Hurricane Katrina's aftermath clearly shows the consequences of not preparing for recovery. New Orleans is still struggling to rebuild its communities, more than three years after Hurricane Katrina.

This summary report indicates the areas of recovery planning in which local governments are well prepared, could be more prepared, and need improvement. What individual jurisdictions have done, while important, is less important than to understand that a major earthquake will not affect just small portions of a particular city. For example, a large earthquake on the Hayward fault, or on one of the several other large faults in the region, is predicted to impact much of the Bay Area. Therefore, this report examines the collective sum of information and analyzes the status of recovery efforts throughout the Bay Area.

The full survey report, *Status Report – Long-Term Disaster Recovery Planning by Local Governments in the San Francisco Bay Area*, is part of ABAG's Long-Term Disaster Recovery Initiative.

## What Can Be Done?

Much of disaster planning to date has focused on the hours and weeks following a disaster so that police and fire departments are prepared for search and rescue, and to put out fires. But recent disasters have repeatedly shown that the weeks and months following a disaster require that all city and county departments work together toward disaster recovery.

During the past year, ABAG has identified four areas where cities and counties should take steps related to long-term recovery planning— NOW – before any disaster – to ensure that they are prepared for:

- financing recovery,
- expediting long-term housing recovery,
- supporting recovery of downtown businesses and the local economy, and
- ensuring that their own facilities and services recover smoothly.

Each of these areas resulted in recommendations for local government actions discussed at workshops of ABAG's Regional Planning Committee (RPC). The workshop issue papers and other background information are available on the ABAG web site at <http://quake.abag.ca.gov/recovery>.

During 2009, ABAG plans to focus on four additional topics related to long-term recovery: infrastructure, education, public health, and land use change.



Damage to San Francisco City Hall in 1906

The following summarizes the results of the questionnaire filled out by 90 of the Bay Area's 109 cities and counties. It divides the responses to the various questions not by functional area, but into three performance categories:

- significant progress,
- mixed results, and
- needs improvement.

## SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS –

### Significant Progress

- 92% of the cities and counties responding to the questionnaire have designated a department or agency to oversee the FEMA claims reimbursement process, which requires extensive and meticulous paperwork. In most cases, this is the finance department. Having one department in charge of the complicated reimbursement process will make the process much smoother and increase the likelihood of receiving funds from FEMA. This is very good news.
- 76% have back-ups of key records and other documents. In the event government offices are not accessible, having back-ups of key records at an alternate location will aid resumption of services.
- 70% have a General Plan that is up-to-date and consistent with local zoning ordinances for residential and commercial areas.

### Mixed Results

- 62% have alternative procedures or plans in place for making payments to employees, vendors and social service recipients.
- 57% have established an emergency fund. In most cases, jurisdictions are relying on their General Fund reserves to function as an emergency fund.
- 52% of jurisdictions allow the city or county manager to make emergency purchases over \$100,000. Of these 44 jurisdictions, 19 indicated that there is, in theory, no dollar limit specified for emergency purchases. Having no limit builds far more flexibility into the recovery process.
- 60% of the respondents have adopted a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) as part of the jurisdiction's General Plan. Adopting a mitigation plan as part of the city or county General Plan makes a jurisdiction eligible for up to \$3 million in FEMA funds per mitigation project. Also, by not having a LHMP, the jurisdiction will be responsible for a 6.25% co-pay for Public Assistance funds that they receive from FEMA after a disaster. ABAG encourages more jurisdictions to adopt a LHMP that is adopted as part of the General Plan. Participating in the update of the multi-jurisdictional Local Hazard Mitigation Plan effort led by ABAG during the coming year will make this effort reasonably simple.

### Needs Improvement

- Only 36% have documented pre-existing conditions of facilities. Documenting pre-existing conditions of sewers and government-owned buildings, for example, greatly facilitates the FEMA reimbursement process because “pre-existing conditions” is the standard FEMA uses to pay for claims. If pre-existing conditions are not documented, receiving funds from FEMA will be a very frustrating and protracted process.
- Only 22% have adopted a repair and reconstruction ordinance. Having a repair and reconstruction ordinance helps secure FEMA funding and can help ensure that mitigation measures are incorporated into the rebuilding process. Who wants to be told by FEMA that it will only reimburse rebuilding of your city hall, built in 1950, to the 1950 building code? By adopting a repair and reconstruction ordinance, FEMA can help pay to rebuild to the improved and flexible standard designated in the ordinance.
- Only 16% provide incentives to strengthen homes with cripple walls. 76% of local governments indicated that they currently do not even have plans to provide incentives.
- Only 11% of jurisdictions with soft story housing mandate seismic strengthening of that housing, or provide incentives for such strengthening. In the event of a major earthquake, the region's housing stock may be heavily impacted and alternative housing will need to be provided by local governments. Short-term housing can easily turn into long-term housing, so it is in local government's interest to do all it can to encourage building owners to retrofit their homes.



Damage to government facilities, such as shown to the Waveland City Hall after Hurricane Katrina, can be devastating if records are not backed up and stored at alternate locations.

**THE FULL REPORT ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS IS AT <http://quake.abag.ca.gov/recovery/>.**

**CREDITS – Prepared by Jeanne Perkins and Linda Min. PHOTO CREDITS – pg. 1-U.S. Geological Survey / pg. 2- J. Perkins.**