

FMAC Merges to form FMIX

As of March 1, 2010, the Map Service Center (MSC) call center and the FEMA Map Assistance Center (FMAC) consolidated to increase efficiency as it will provide a one-stop shop for a variety of information, products, services and tools that support the NFIP. In parallel the now joined center has been given a new name - FEMA Map Information eXchange, or FMIX.

The toll-free number currently used by FMAC, 1-877-FEMA MAP (1-877-336-2627), should be used instead of the MSC call center number (1-800-358-9616). The MSC call center number is currently active, but will be discontinued later this year.

Effective immediately, new Post-Preliminary correspondences should be prepared to refer to the FMAC as FEMA Map Information eXchange (FMIX) and replace any reference to the MSC call center or toll-free number (1-800-358-9616). Please note, there is no requirement to change any letters already generated and in process.

These changes do affect but are not limited to the following documents that reference contact information for either the FMAC or the MSC call center:

- FIRM panel (including Index)
- FIS report
- Preliminary letter
- Preliminary fact sheet
- Revised preliminary letter
- 116 letter
- 90-day start letter
- Web newspaper notice
- Appeals/protests letter
- LFD letter (including rescissions)
- 179 letters
- Revalidation letters 1 and 2

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



Submit your own items or suggestions for future topics to column editor Rebecca Quinn, CFM, at rcquinn@earthlink.net. Comments welcomed!

Here's Something You Might Find Interesting . . .

For many years FEMA has stated that the flood-resistant provisions of the International Code Series (I-Codes) that deal with building and structures are consistent with the NFIP*. That's a significant statement because the majority of communities enforce these codes, which often are adopted at the State level.

Having the flood provisions in the codes is advantageous, but also presents some challenges. Perhaps the biggest challenge is coordinating with local floodplain management ordinances that more than 21,000

* FEMA makes the same statement about the *Building Construction and Safety Code* (NFPA 5000) published by the National Fire Protection Association.

communities have adopted in order to participate in the NFIP. Most of those communities have what is sometimes called a “stand-alone” ordinance or regulation – it includes every single NFIP provision. But the reality is the codes have flood provisions (unless those provisions have been deleted at the State level). So it makes sense that floodplain managers better understand the scope of the codes, limitations of the codes, and how best to coordinate the codes with local ordinances. This is particularly important if the floodplain management ordinance is administered in an office other than the building department.

When we say “building code,” we’re really referring to a family of codes that includes the building code that applies to what floodplain managers call non-residential buildings (sometimes call the commercial code), the residential code (1- and 2-family homes and townhomes), the existing building code, codes that specifically address mechanical, plumbing, and fuel gas systems, and the fire code. Some States and communities adopt all of those codes, while some adopt some of them.

Not surprisingly, the building codes apply only to buildings and structures within the scopes of the codes. Of course, the NFIP requires communities to regulate all development, including activities that do not involve buildings. This means enforcing just the building codes does not fully satisfy the NFIP requirements. If IBC Appendix G is adopted, then all NFIP requirements are addressed because it picks up administrative provisions and non-building development. Some States have adopted Appendix G or make it available for local adoption.

There are a number of advantages to having flood provisions in the codes:

- All hazard-related requirements are in one place – all loads are considered when engineers and architects prepare designs.
- Multiple inspections strengthens enforcement (many planning offices don’t regularly perform field inspections). The codes require submission of elevation data upon placement of the lowest floor and prior to further vertical construction.
- Codes require permits for work on existing buildings (planning offices rarely get involved when work is proposed on existing buildings).
- Damaged buildings – code officials are best qualified to deal with damaged buildings, whether conducting the initial safety inspection (red tag, green tag, yellow tag) or looking at permit applications for repairs and making substantial damage determinations.

Having the flood provisions in the codes also presents a few challenges:

- Dealing with differences – potential for conflict between your floodplain management ordinance and the codes – although the most restrictive prevails always applies.
- Codes only apply to buildings and structures – thus an ordinance is necessary to capture some NFIP-required administrative provisions and requirement that apply to all other development (unless IBC Appendix G, mentioned above, is enforced).
- Codes exempt certain activities – an ordinance is necessary to recapture those activities.
- Some States allow local amendments to the codes, while others do not. This can make it harder to adopt higher floodplain management standards that apply to buildings, such as freeboard. Some states have modified the codes to include freeboard and some states specifically allow communities to add freeboard.

Building codes come into play after decisions have been made about what to build and where to build it. Thus, codes are not the mechanism that helps communities to guide development to less hazard prone

areas. That objective is best accomplished with various planning and zoning tools. But once the decision to build in a flood hazard area has been made, then the codes govern.

So, what should you do with this information? The first step might be to get together all community staff members who are involved in regulating development and administering building codes. Then do a side-by-side comparison of your ordinance, the NFIP regulations, and the codes to determine who is responsible for what. A worksheet to help do this, and a crosswalk of the NFIP provisions and the code sections, is included in *Reducing Flood Losses Through the International Codes®: Meeting the Requirements of the National Flood Insurance Program* (order hardcopy from the International Code Council, www.iccsafe.org or download from FEMA's webpage).

FEMA has been spreading the word about the flood provisions in I-Codes through a series of workshops that are being delivered in all 10 FEMA Regions and have been attended by many State NFIP Coordinators. For more information about these workshops, contact John Ingargiola with FEMA's Building Science Branch (john.ingargiola@dhs.gov).

I'll leave it for another column to highlight some of the differences between the NFIP requirements and the codes and ASCE 24, a standard that is referenced by the codes. (You can find "Highlights of ASCE 24" at www.floods.org/PDF/ASCE24_Highlights_1008.pdf.)

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[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Washington Legislative Report

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A Three-Ring Circus in Washington D.C. and on Capitol Hill

Activity on the Hill involving issues of interest to floodplain managers has been proceeding in many arenas, seemingly all at once. The continued authorization for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) was caught up in much bigger picture political maneuvering and its authorization beyond March 28 continues to require attention. Hearings on Fiscal Year 2011 budget requests for the various departments and agencies are proceeding rapidly in both appropriations and authorizing committees and in both the House and Senate – often overlapping. Hearings on disaster policy, needed changes to the Stafford Act, implementation of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 (WRDA '07), and federal insurance for catastrophic losses are moving forward in preparation for legislation. ASFPM presented testimony on the Conference of Mayors Report on the Stafford Act and related recommendations for Stafford Act revisions.

The ASFPM has been actively engaged in discussions on Capitol Hill, in federal agencies and with partner organizations on the new Principles and Standards (P & S) for water resources programs, on extending the comment period for the P & S, on the work of the National Committee on Levee Safety (NCLS) and its legislative recommendations, and on the problems and opportunities associated with the levee status/flood map issues – to name a number of the issues requiring attention.

Much of this was taking place in the midst of major snow accumulations which delayed action on some matters and forced multiple postponements and rescheduling of hearings and meetings. With the federal