ASFPM Launches Floodplain Manager’s Notebook Series Online.

How many times have you re-membered a piece of infor-mation you read in a Floodplain Manager’s Notebook column, but couldn’t remember which one? ASFPM developed and just launched the Floodplain Manager’s Notebook Series, an online resource to help you find the right column from the past 10 years. The 2018 columns will be uploaded in 2019.

For more in-depth answers, local officials should also get in touch with NFIP state coordinators (what ASFPM refers to as state floodplain managers). And everyone should have a go-to list of FEMA publications when I write my columns. Sign up at https://www.fema.gov/email to get emails when FEMA releases new or revised publications. In the coming months I’ll update the newcomer’s recommended reading list I included in my July 2013 column.

Note the search tool for the Notebook Series pulls from keywords I assign, not the content of every issue. That means your search will return the most pertinent columns, not every column that happens to use a searched term. Keep trying with related terms and please get in touch if there’s a specific topic you’re researching but don’t find. Fair warning – come with an intriguing question and I may ask you to co-author a column!

When I started this column about 10 years ago, I had a growing awareness of the importance of helping newcomers. I also thought I might have some interesting stories to share. Many ASFPM members and newsletter readers have been floodplain managers for decades and have a wealth of experience to share. Tapping into that knowledge base can be a challenge unless you’re lucky enough to work for or spend time with a mentor. These days, most government agencies are so lean there often isn’t someone waiting in the wings to take over when the long-termers retire.

The age-old method to fill the knowledge gap is, of course, publications and training. FEMA produces a rich set of guidance documents to help floodplain managers and others interpret and apply the NFIP regulations found in 44 CFR Sec. 59.1 (definitions) and Part 60 (criteria for land management and use). Most publications also illustrate lessons learned from disasters and best practices. FEMA and others offer workshops and classes related to regulating development in special flood hazard areas. To say nothing about all there is to learn about flood studies, mapping and map revision process, and the insurance side of the
business! But few communities and state agencies have the resources to send staff to conferences and trainings, even when sessions are deployed at locations around the country.

So now, along with my bi-monthly column, I hope the online tool to access past issues will help to fill at least some of the knowledge gap.

**Freeboard – is it for protection or for show?**

Is freeboard (additional elevation) intended for increased resistance to flood loads or is it just a “splash guard?” From time to time someone asks me something about freeboard that prompts me to pose that question in return. I hear a lot of communities talk about adopting freeboard “for the points,” referring to the Community Rating System. The insurance discounts are the reward for meeting the goals of the CRS – and reducing damage is the first goal listed (top sidebar). The elevation of the lowest floor relative to the Base Flood Elevation is the primary building characteristic that influences the cost of NFIP flood insurance (graphic).

Now, assume your community has freeboard, whether it’s because your elected officials are progressive and locally adopted it, your state mandates freeboard, or you enforce building codes with freeboard (lower sidebar). First, keep in mind freeboard affects how high the floor and other building elements must be relative to the flood elevation. Now, think about the scenario where water actually rises up to the level of your freeboard and consider how you should answer these questions:

1. Do flood damage-resistant materials have to be used up to the BFE or up to BFE plus freeboard?
2. If the floor of a garage is at or a little below the BFE, are flood openings required in walls below the freeboard?
3. What about equipment – does the heat pump have to be higher than the BFE?
4. Does a dry floodproofed building have to be designed for flood loads for water up to the BFE or BFE plus freeboard?

In each case, your answer should recognize that damage would occur if freeboard is just for show – just a “splash guard.” The answer should always be that all requirements apply below the required elevation, including freeboard. Answering the dry floodproofing question any other way could result in the most significant damage, given how flood loads increase with depth. Also, consider the equipment question: if the Elevation Certificate shows equipment is lower than the lowest floor, the policy will likely be written using the lower elevation – obviating the damage reduction and insurance benefits of freeboard!

**Goals of the CRS:**

1. Reduce flood damage to insurable property;
2. Strengthen and support the insurance aspects of the NFIP, and
3. Encourage a comprehensive approach to floodplain management.

**Communities with Building Codes**

Pay attention when your state or community transitions to codes based on the 2015 International Residential Code. It requires minimum BFE + 1 foot in all flood zones! The International Building Code, by reference to ASCE 24 Flood Design and Construction, has required minimum BFE + 1 foot since its initial publication in 2000.

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