

LOCAL NEWS

Marin to update natural hazard mitigation plan

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Marin emergency managers are asking residents to get involved in a five-year update of the county's hazard mitigation plan.

The plan, last updated in 2017, identifies areas where the county is vulnerable in the event of fires, flooding, earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides, sea level rise, sinkholes or related risks, said Steven Torrence, the county's emergency management director.

It also pinpoints areas for improvements. Those could include adding more fire breaks, better evacuation routes, increased community alerts and possibly new levees or water pumping stations.

“Our goal is to decrease vulnerabilities and to harden existing infrastructure,” Torrence said. “Based on my report, we have participation from all cities and towns and special districts.”

The stormy season in Marin might have changed the county’s hazard predictions regarding water emergencies from those that are drought-related to those involving heavy rains and floods, Torrence said. With the plan update, the county will start doing annual reviews of the data to make sure the predictions are up to date, he said.

“We actually have a plan in place that we’re going to evaluate the plan annually, just so we can continuously monitor all the proposed projects we have going on, linked with what’s actually going on in the community,” Torrence said.

“What we’re seeing, specifically with climate change, those vulnerabilities — the flood gauges, the flooding patterns — may not necessarily line up with the plans that are being drawn up,” he said. “We need to look at, is this the current data or do we need to change our posture?”

Residents can fill out an online survey to comment on hazards in their neighborhoods. The survey is available at bit.ly/3UmJRWg.

In addition, two public forums will be held on the topic, both in person and online.

The first is set for 6 p.m. Thursday in the Board of Supervisors chambers at the Marin County Civic Center at 3501 Civic Center Drive in San Rafael. The second meeting is scheduled for 10 a.m. April 29 at the Marin Health and Wellness Campus at 3240 Kerner Blvd. in San Rafael.

Quinn Gardner, San Rafael’s emergency manager, said one of the hazards to be identified in the city is the need for updating its dozen or so water pumping stations.

“When there’s flooding, we need to be able to pump water out of the low-lying areas and redirect it to the rivers and ocean,” Gardner said.

Also, as protection for an earthquake, the city needs to upgrade pumping stations and power lines, Gardner said.

“We need to make sure we have backup, in case power goes out,” she said.

Gardner said the city will need to apply for federal and state grants for those types of expensive capital improvement projects. The Marin hazard mitigation plan is a necessary part of any grant application, Gardner said.

Torrence said the the county will add the public comments to a draft report it will bring before the county Board of Supervisors in October or November. The final report is due to the Federal Emergency Management Agency in December, he said.

“By understanding what natural hazards we face in Marin County, and how those hazards may impact our communities, we can seek ways to protect people, property and the environment from the impact of these hazards,” Torrence added.

More information about the plan and the public forums is available at bit.ly/43jPecT.

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