



Build Back Safe & Smarter

Communities wrecked by Hurricane Sandy can seize this opportunity to rebuild in better, safer, and smarter ways, according to the Natural Hazard Mitigation Association.

NHMA has issued a paper entitled “Build Back Safer & Smarter” with nine steps local leaders, businesses, and homeowners can follow as they recover from the storm that hit the U.S. East Coast in late October. The four page paper and resources and links to help implement the nine steps are available at www.NHMA.info/Sandy.

NHMA’s recipe for smart rebuilding includes 9 steps that have been time-tested in many local recoveries:

1. **Know the rules.** It’s tempting to waive the rules, but good building codes are essential. One of the flood insurance rules is important, too: Buildings that are “substantially damaged” (more than 50 percent) need special treatment. Mitigation (such as elevation above flood heights) to reduce future losses may be required under the community’s agreement with the National Flood Insurance Program.
2. **Adopt higher redevelopment standards.** National standards are usually minimums and often don’t consider future growth or sea rise, for example. Go above the minimum today to be safe tomorrow.
3. **Commit to mitigate.** A community resolution or announcement can lay out the pathway to safe recovery.
4. **Triage the damaged areas.** In a rapid assessment of the area, assign damaged buildings to categories that will guide recovery decisions: apparently safe, obviously substantially damaged, or perhaps substantially damaged.
5. **Identify target areas:** Special treatment may be needed for substantially damaged neighborhoods with high potential for future losses. Some communities choose to hold off on rebuilding there until detailed plans can be developed. In some cases, it may be necessary to help people move to safer building sites. Rebuilding can proceed outside the target areas, hopefully incorporating mitigation measures in the process.
6. **Involved those affected in planning.** Nobody knows a neighborhood better than the people who live there, and they should be involved in all facets of the planning.
7. **Keep everybody informed.** Every survivor needs to know how the plan is progressing and why the community is making decisions.
8. **Ensure full repairs and reconstruction.** Before people move back in, buildings must be inspected to be sure they are safe, sanitary, and free of mold or bacteria and that substantially damaged buildings are brought up to the required codes.
9. **Mitigate!** To the extent possible, improve buildings with mitigation features such as elevating homes or appliances, installing hurricane straps or shutters, adding impact resistant roofing, and perhaps building new neighborhoods around planned community open space preservation areas. Funding may be available to help with mitigation measures.