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State and Local Programs for Flood Hazard Management in the Southeast

Flooding is a serious national problem. It affects every state, over half of the communities, and an estimated seven percent of the land area in the United States. In an effort to slow escalating flood losses and reduce mounting expenditures for structural protective works and flood disaster assistance, federal flood hazard mitigation policy has increasingly stressed the need for a balanced approach to flood problems. Such an approach employs both structural and non-structural measures. While structural measures, such as dams, levees, and channel alterations have a long history of successful application, a number of non-structural measures have drawn increasing attention. They include land use regulations, floodproofing, flood forecasting, flood insurance, and postflood recovery planning. Most of these non-structural measures cannot be implemented by the federal government acting alone; they require a cooperative effort among federal, state, and local governments.

But flooding does not seem to be of high priority for local and state governments unless they have recently experienced a flood. One study found that concern for flooding ranked twelfth among eighteen community problems evaluated by local leaders. Another found that the average flood-prone community in the U.S. devotes less than $10,000 per year to flood hazard management.

Researchers at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, have found a wide variety of state and local government flood management practices. At the level these include:

- planning and coordination practices, such as water resources planning and reviews of bridge design;
- grants-in-aid to local governments or flood plain occupants for land acquisition and relocation;
- wetlands protection, dam safety, and other regulatory practices;
- public investment in flood control works;
- technical assistance to local governments; and
- post-disaster assistance.

At the local level, practices may include special zoning and subdivision requirements for flood prone properties, dredge and fill requirements, and public information programs.

In terms of the number of state and local practices used to reduce potential flood losses, the southeast as a region is typical of the nation. Within the region, however, there is wide variation. Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia equal or exceed the regional median in total number of state practices and median number of local practices.

The southeast is roughly equivalent to the nation in evaluations of the effectiveness of:

- state programs for the prevention of flood damages;
- local programs for reducing exposure of existing and future development to flood damage; and
- local programs for solving the problems of flood plain occupants.

Tennessee and Virginia are evaluated above average for the region on all dimensions of program effectiveness. For all states, local programs to reduce exposure of future development to flood damage are considered the most successful. In only isolated cases are other programs viewed as even somewhat effective.

In some instances, the states with many flood management practices also have effective programs (Tennessee and Virginia). However, there is no clear relationship between the number of practices used and their effectiveness. States and localities in the southeast are active in addressing flood hazard problems, but they are not always effective in solving these problems.

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	STATE PRACTICES		LOCAL PRACTICES		
		Evaluation:		Evaluations:	
	Number	Prevention of Flood Damages	Median Number	Reducing Exposure of Existing Dev.	Reducing Exposure of Future Dev.
Alabama	13	.44	3.7	.50	.70
Florida	23	.49	6.3	.42	.70
Georgia	14	.20	6.3	.34	.70
Mississippi	16	.45	6.0	.48	.70
N. Carolina	17	.41	6.3	.27	.75
S. Carolina	17	.29	3.6	.09	.70
Tennessee	19	.60	6.4	.42	.80
Virginia	24	.50	6.6	.42	.90
SOUTHEAST (Median)	18	.46	6.3	.39	.75
NATION (Median)	19	.48	6.2	.41	.75

The scale used for these measures is as follows: 1 = very effective; .5 = somewhat effective; 0 = not effective