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FEMA



# Best practices

Disaster Mitigation Working in Alaska

## Alaska



Galena

**The only thing more difficult than preparing for a disaster is explaining why you didn't.**

**Galena, Alaska** -This small, isolated town on the north bank of the Yukon River is about 270 miles west of Fairbanks and 350 miles north of Anchorage. There are no roads to Galena. Everyone and everything must arrive by airplane or boat. Winter temperatures can plunge to minus 60 degrees. Massive ice jams and flooding destroyed most of the town in 1945 and again in 1971.

**Shanda Huntington, the city clerk of Galena, is also the city's floodplain administrator.** Her role requires a thorough knowledge of legal and floodplain management issues. To do a good job she must understand the complexities of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and a wide variety of other state and federal programs and policies.

**May 28, 2013, brought another round of ice, water and misery. Most homes, businesses, public buildings, roads, power, water and sewer systems were damaged or destroyed.** Most town residents needed to be evacuated as the floodwater came within inches of overwhelming the airfield—the only way out!

## Stepping Up to the Critical Need for Floodplain Management



**2013 - Yukon River ice and water overwhelm Galena, Alaska**

**Fortunately, Shanda was prepared to step up to the many challenges she faced as a local official. She remarked, "Had I not had the right training I'd be completely lost."** In September 2012, she had traveled to Anchorage and, with 20 other students, attended an intensive five-day course, "Managing Flood Plain Development through the NFIP." These sessions were coordinated by Alaska's Floodplain Coordinator Taunnie Boothby, who was also one of the instructors. There was great cooperation among the State, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Municipality of Anchorage.

While this class is normally offered at the Emergency Management Institute in Emmitsburg, Maryland, the need for special sessions tailored to unique Alaska challenges was recognized by FEMA and State officials. Making and keeping travel plans from remote Alaska

communities to a small town in Maryland is, at best, daunting and exhausting. **Recognizing the critical need for the training, the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management provided travel funds to bring students from their communities to Anchorage.**

In the weeks and months since the devastating flood, progress toward recovery can be seen throughout Galena. Local people and volunteers, along with state, federal and non-governmental organizations have worked hand in hand. **It's also important to recognize that the planning and work to chart a more sustainable future began well before the May 2013 flood, and is continuing as a community-wide priority.**

**For more information contact: Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, Division of Community and Regional Affairs**  
<http://commerce.state.ak.us/dnn/dcra/Home.aspx>