

Looking Back and Forward

By: David Lloyd, P.E.

Executive Director, Urban Drainage and Flood Control District

How fortunate we are to live in the State of Colorado. This has never been more in evidence than over the past year as we've witnessed several natural disasters of epic proportions.

I was just recently reading the cover story in the November 2005 issue of "Natural Hazards Observer." The article points out that in the last year alone, we've experienced a multitude of disasters including winter storms, wildfires, floods, tornadoes, landslides, and most recently Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina, and Rita. Although not directly affecting the United States, the earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean last December claimed over 240,000 lives across 12 countries and injured, displaced or otherwise impacted millions.

In light of this past years events, disaster reduction has once again moved to the infamous "front burner." One product of this has been the report from the Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction, part of the President's National Science and Technology Council, entitled "Grand Challenges for Disaster Reduction." The report was prepared in an effort to establish a framework for future government investment in science and technology for the purpose of enhancing the United States' resilience and reducing our vulnerability to natural and technological hazards.

As was evidenced along the gulf coast, our communities are still challenged by disaster preparation, response and recovery. Although lives lost to natural disasters each year have been reduced, the annual cost of major disasters continues to rise. The Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction identified four key characteristics of disaster-resilient communities:

- Relevant hazards are recognized and understood
- Communities at risk know when a hazard event is imminent
- Individuals at risk are safe from hazards in their homes and places of work
- Disaster-resilient communities experience minimum disruption to life and economy after a hazard event has passed

From a flood control professional's perspective, these are all very enviable goals to strive for in the area of floodplain management; however, identifying the course of action is only the first step in the process. Competition for the every decreasing tax dollar is always a daunting task for flood control managers.

Even though the Katrina's and Rita's of this past year go a long way in keeping us focused upon the arena of sound floodplain management, mankind has always proven itself to have a short memory (he says as he sits here trying to remember what he had for breakfast).

In the words of Paul Danish, former Boulder County Commissioner and Director on the District's Board when asked if a devastating flood could occur one day along Boulder Creek: "Not only yes, but hell yes."

Organizational and Staff Changes

This past year we were pleased to create a new program area within the District organization. Kevin Stewart was selected to be the Manager of the District's new Information Services and Flood Warning Program. Earlier this year we hired Chad Kudym to assist Kevin in this new program. Chad brings to the District a wealth of knowledge and experience in the GIS arena and we are pleased to have him on staff (even if he is a Cornhusker).