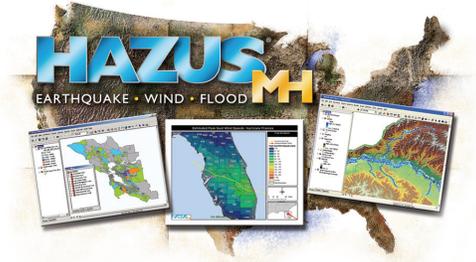


The Florida HAZUS User Group (FLHUG):

A Catalyst for Mitigating Risks and Improving Collaboration Between Florida's Emergency Management Professionals

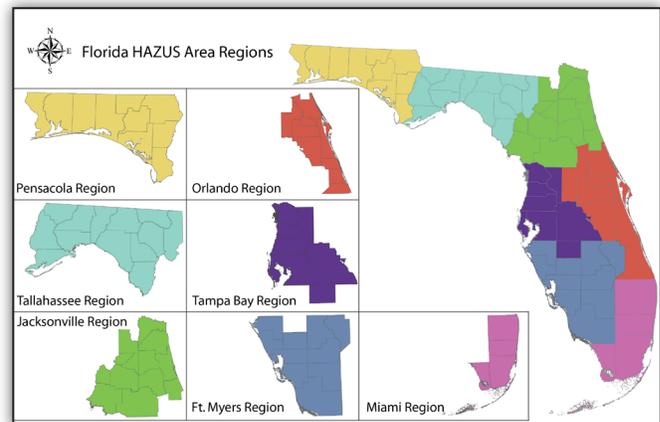


Background

When Hurricane Charley, a Category 4 storm, hit Southwestern Florida on August 13, 2004, its impact was devastating. The largest storm to make landfall on Florida shores since Hurricane Andrew in 1992, Charley thrust the state into mitigation mode and spurred its emergency management leaders to focus on strategies that would estimate and minimize potential losses from the hurricane and flood hazards. The state used HAZUS® methodology as its primary tool for this work and offered HAZUS-MH® trainings regionally (beginning with the Southwest Pilot Project) as the “carrot” to entice diverse groups to become involved in Florida’s disaster mitigation plans. Professionals from Florida also participated in HAZUS-MH courses at FEMA’s Emergency Management Institute (EMI). The Florida HAZUS User Group (FLHUG) was formally organized in January 2006, when the group met to elect officers, create committees, and adopt a charter. This important step expanded a process that began two years earlier, making HAZUS trainings more widely available and encouraging statewide collaboration between emergency mitigation professionals in both the public and private sectors.

Benefits

Membership in the FLHUG allows first responders, emergency managers, and decision makers from public and private organizations to build and strengthen a cohesive, informed emergency management community that can continually create stronger and more accurate mitigation plans. People interested in disaster mitigation have learned that, as members of FLHUG, they benefit not only from the scenarios generated by HAZUS-MH, but also by the lasting working relationships they develop with colleagues in different fields. Spanning public and private domains, GIS professionals, emergency managers, researchers, medical personnel, legislative contacts, local planners, technical experts, American Red Cross workers, facility managers, and government officials can all use the FLHUG to communicate with and learn from each other—sharing resources and supporting each other’s work to mitigate the risks of natural disasters. In addition to user networks, strong support from the Florida Division of Emergency Management (DEM) and FEMA Region IV has been critical to the success of Florida’s coordinated statewide program.



Projects

- FLHUG members recruit new users interested in learning HAZUS-MH by making presentations and conducting workshops at conventions and meetings throughout the state. These have been given at the Florida Governor's Hurricane Conference, the Southeast Regional User Group Conference (SERUG), the Seven Hills Regional User Group GIS Workshop, the Central Florida GIS Workshop, the South Florida GIS Exposition, the National Flood Insurance Conference, the ESRI International User Conference, and the National HAZUS User Conference. Currently, the most active Florida HAZUS users work in the fields of emergency management, GIS, planning, and public safety.
- Lee County HAZUS user Amy Hoyt is spearheading an effort to develop standardization among damage-assessment tools that will be part of a statewide (and potentially nationwide) model for conducting wind-damage assessments. Developed using FEMA damage-assessment methodologies, these tools are being expanded to provide a fast and reliable way of providing data for measuring how well the HAZUS wind and flood models are performing.
- Collier County is now able to produce detailed modeling results, which more accurately reflect the effects a disaster event would have on this rapidly developing jurisdiction. The Collier County project involves the incorporation of HAZUS "Level 2" data into the countywide GIS inventory. Working in close collaboration with the county's GIS department and Property Appraiser's Office, Bold Planning Solutions replaced HAZUS-MH default inventory data and updated the data (including demographic, essential facilities, and general building stock) by incorporating the most current local GIS information into HAZUS-MH.
- Thanks to a dedicated collaborative effort between FLHUG members and the Florida Division of Emergency Management, a new dataset was crafted to provide a Level 2 replacement of critical infrastructure data. Available to FEMA and NIBS, this updated dataset will be distributed to all HAZUS-MH users modeling Florida wind, flood, and earthquake events. This effort was the result of the FLHUG Technical Committee's data group.
- FLHUG is networking with Cadastral or property appraiser organizations, engineering and consulting firms, and state and federal agencies operating in Florida.
- FLHUG has partnered with academia and the private sector to deliver classroom training for users. 2008 will see an outreach to shift training for HAZUS-MH basic courses into universities and colleges by expanding course offerings for relevant degree and professional education programs.



Possibilities

The FLHUG is now active in all seven Florida HAZUS regions: Pensacola, Tallahassee, Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa Bay, Fort Myers, and Miami (see map). November 2007 marked the launch of the FLHUG Web site (<http://flhug.hazus.org>), further allowing committees, regional chapters, and membership to grow. In collaboration, these groups are developing statewide initiatives in data management, disaster preparedness, response operations, mitigation, and post-disaster redevelopment. The State of Florida expects to continue

to make significant progress during 2008 in the use of HAZUS-MH for assessment, mitigation, and response and recovery planning at the state and local level.

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