

# Mitigation Assessment Team Program

## Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: What is hazard mitigation?**

A: Hazard mitigation is any action that reduces or eliminates risks to people and property from flooding, hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, and other disasters. Examples range from moving washers and dryers to higher floors to avoid potential basement flooding, to elevating homes above potential flood levels, to using best practices for building critical facilities stronger and safer.

**Q: What is FEMA's Mitigation Assessment Team Program?**

A: FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assessment Teams (MATs) conduct engineering analyses after major natural disasters to assess damage to government facilities, homes, businesses, and other structures, and to determine the causes of structural failures and successes. The teams include representatives from FEMA, state and local agencies, and a range of private sector specialists in structural and civil engineering, architecture, building construction, floodplain management, and building code development and enforcement. Based on a comprehensive analysis of the data, the teams prepare recommendations regarding construction codes and standards, building design issues, and best practices that communities and the construction industry can use to reduce damage from future disasters.

**Q: Are MATs operating in areas affected by Hurricane Katrina?**

A: FEMA MATs have been deployed to evaluate damage caused by Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The MATs investigated a range of commercial, residential, and essential structures, including hospitals, police and fire stations, schools, and government offices. The MATs analyzed the causes of structural failures and successes, the extent of wind damage, the height of flooding, and the contamination of building materials caused by contact with flood water containing toxic materials. The MATs then established recommendations regarding building construction and design, building codes, and mitigation activities that can reduce damage from future natural disasters.

**Q: How does FEMA release the inspection results and recommendations?**

A: FEMA consults with a team of government agencies and private organizations to finalize the MAT analyses and establish recommendations. As soon as consensus is reached, FEMA issues a series of "Recovery Advisories," which provide initial guidance on building issues and best practices that can be used in the reconstruction process. Later, FEMA publishes a comprehensive report that provides observations, recommendations, and technical guidance on retrofitting or reconstructing buildings damaged by hazard events.

**Q: How long does the process take?**

A: Field investigations take about two weeks, depending on access and safety factors. The entire process – including data collection, analysis, collaboration, and recommendations – takes several months to complete.

**Q: How do the recommendations affect the rebuilding process?**

A: State and local officials responsible for building codes have the option of encouraging or mandating the use of MAT findings and recommendations for new construction and retrofitting during the rebuilding effort.

**Q: What information resources are currently available for homeowners seeking to learn how to protect, restore, or re-build their properties?**

A: FEMA has published the “Homeowner’s Guide to Retrofitting,” (FEMA 312) for individuals whose homes have been flooded or that are located in flood hazard areas. This publication outlines the actions individuals should take to reduce flood damage to their homes. It explains the damage-reduction methods that are available, discusses the degree to which they work, and helps individuals determine whether the methods meet their needs. This publication is designed for readers who have little or no knowledge of flood protection methods or building construction techniques.

FEMA also has produced a series of 31 illustrated fact sheets that provide technical guidance and recommendations concerning the construction of coastal residential buildings. These materials present information aimed at improving the performance of buildings subject to flood and wind forces in coastal environments. The fact sheets make extensive use of photographs and drawings to illustrate National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) regulatory requirements; the proper siting of coastal buildings; and recommended design and construction practices, including structural connections, the building envelope, utilities, and accessory structures. In addition, many of the fact sheets include lists of additional resources that provide more information about the topics discussed. The fact sheets are available in digital form as Adobe PDF files that can be downloaded from FEMA’s website, [http://www.fema.gov/rebuild/mat/mat\\_fema499](http://www.fema.gov/rebuild/mat/mat_fema499). A print publication (FEMA 499) is also available from the FEMA Distribution Center at 1-800-480-2520.