

# Revised flood level map ready for public

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**MOUNT VERNON** — After more than ten years of studies, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials have another revised copy of a flood elevations map ready for public comment.

In a presentation to the Board of Commissioners Monday, FEMA Regional Director Chuck Steele outlined the map development process which has spanned a decade filled with controversy.

Since FEMA's flood insurance study of 1972, local officials and residents have argued back and forth with the federal agency regarding the placement of flood elevations, which impact local construction and development.

The original study by the U.S. Army

Corps of Engineers was never issued, Steele said, as the map did not address all flood-prone areas of Skagit County.

Three years later, an update to the study was a focus of attention in what Steele called a "lengthy" process of dealing the Skagit River's expansive delta area, starting in 1975.

Completed in 1981, the update was then presented to Skagit County and city officials, receiving a "great deal of comment," Steele recalled.

Due to some mapping errors which called attention to further problems with the maps, another review was made.

March of 1982 brought another round of meetings with city and county officials regarding a "new approach" to solving the mapping problem for the Skagit River delta, using flow paths.

The latest version of the map is now in circulation, the topic of discussion in Mount Vernon and Burlington city halls and the Skagit County Courthouse.

Major differences in the newest map pointed out by Steele generally lower the elevation figures.

"We added up all the figures and we came up with too much water, that's all," he said of the revisions.

"It is a statistical flood, not a historical flood," he said.

The new map also represents a deviation from the commonly used density concept, which he noted as "difficult to administer and difficult to explain."

In the area of downtown Mount Vernon, flood elevations for construction were reduced from nine feet to

three feet, to indicate a "sheet flow" of water, and to match the elevation assigned to west Mount Vernon, Steele said.

From downtown Mount Vernon to Blackburn Road, elevation requirements proposed by FEMA in the present map are one foot above existing ground level, while from Blackburn south to Hickox Road, the elevation is proposed as two feet above ground level and a three-foot elevation from Hickox south to Conway.

Steele noted that in addition to the shallow "A-O" flood zone of the area of west Mount Vernon and Avon, the water would carry a velocity of four to six feet per second.

Elevations for the general area of Riverside Drive and College Way has been reduced from a range of 32 to 34 feet down to 30 feet, Steele said.

Steele noted the general zones now indicated on the map may cause an "administrative nightmare" locally as building officials deal with the figures and the differing elevations of the land.

"What we've given you is a three-foot general figure, there may be some areas higher and some lower," Steele said.

The next step in the process will be to hold individual coordinating meetings with the jurisdictions involved.

Reports for Burlington and Mount Vernon will then be completed for review by the respective cities. The report for Skagit County will be much more involved and more time consuming, Steele said.

Should serious questions develop at that point, "we will take it upon

ourselves to do additional work, which is what we've done all along," Steele said.

If no questions arise, Steele said the 10 to 12-month effort to process the map through will begin, he said.

Publication of the latest flood water elevations will initiate the formal three-month appeal period, when city and county officials or private residents may express their views regarding the most recent data.

Six months after appeals local ordinances must be adopted, Steele said.

Mount Vernon Building Official Ron Maynock asked if that city could adopt an emergency clause to immediately provide for the most recent map.

"As far as we're concerned, it is new information and it can be used today," he said.

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