

AT-RISK RESIDENTS' KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS ABOUT STRUCTURAL
AND NONSTRUCTURAL FLOOD MITIGATION ACTIONS

Shirley Laska
Department of Sociology
University of New Orleans

Introduction

Recently a newspaper editorial appeared in the local newspaper of a Louisiana community which is in the process of determining how best to protect itself from a repeat of three devastating floods which have occurred in the last six years. The editorial was in response to the final public meeting held by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on a proposed levee system. The community has been informed that the cost to the community (with the proposed new cost-sharing ratio of 65/35 will be 7 million dollars). The community has several concerns: whether the federal government will actually fund the project, how they will fund the community's portion of the cost and why the levee will not protect all affected neighborhoods.

Some six years after the first major flood and two years after the initiation of the Corps's study to suggest flood mitigation action the editorial states:

"In view of this (the problems cited above), local officials and the public might do well to explore *other flood control protection measures* (italics mine) that wouldn't require federal dollars."

(Slidell Daily Times, April 19, 1985)

It is the contention of this author that to have such a statement made by a seriously and repeatedly flooded community some six years into the process of determining flood mitigation action is an indicator of a planning and decision-making process much in need of revision both in terms of the steps taken and second in terms of the options provided.

While the actual implementation of the flood mitigation actions has been generally in the hands of government officials, the decision-making process as to which mitigation actions are to be taken is a shared one between residents and officials. It is evident from the violations of FIA flood elevation requirements that when the