
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA) SCIENTIFIC REVIEW PANEL (SRP)

FACTS

Date Started: 2010

Legislation:

While FEMA had previously established an SRP process, the Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012 formally established a statutory requirement for the SRP.

Products/Deliverables:

Written rationale and decision based on a simple majority vote of the 5 members in a written report made available to FEMA and the community.

MISSION

Flood hazards constantly change, and so FEMA regularly updates Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) via several methods to reflect those changes. FEMA usually resolves challenges to proposed flood hazard data via community consultation. When this consultation fails to produce a mutually acceptable resolution, the Scientific Review Panel (SRP) process is used.

SRPs perform independent reviews of scientific and technical data submitted by a community challenging FEMA's flood elevation data and studies used to develop proposed flood hazard data for the National Flood Insurance Program's FIRMs. SRPs review FEMA's flood hazard data and alternative data submitted by the community to determine which studies are technically and scientifically more accurate.

BENEFITS AND USES OF FINDINGS

The SRP process reinforces FEMA's commitment to work with communities to ensure the flood hazard data depicted on FIRMs is built collaboratively using the best science available.

SRPs are established to achieve these benefits to both FEMA and communities:

1. Offering a process deemed neutral by independent third parties, demonstrating that FEMA is not both judge and jury for its products
- 2) Confirming FEMA's commitment to using the best science, regardless of its source, for the purpose of accurately depicting flood hazards on flood maps
- 3) Providing efficient resolution of contentious appeals and/or conflicting technical and/or scientific data

The SRP decision serves as the recommendation to FEMA for resolving conflicting flood hazard data. This written decision denies or accepts the alternative flood hazard data submitted by a community.

SUBJECT AREAS

Coastal flood hazard analysis, riverine flood hazard analysis, lacustrine flood hazard analysis, alluvial fan engineering, water resource engineering, surface water hydrology, open-channel flow hydraulics, hydrologic engineering, coastal storm and hydraulic engineering, coastal geotechnical engineering, coastal storm generation, geotechnical engineering, topographic data – surveys, light detection and ranging, photogrammetric, etc.

COMMITTEE

Individual panels consisting of 5 members selected from an independent cadre of scientific and technical experts in surface water hydrology, hydraulics, coastal engineering, and other engineering and scientific fields that relate to creation of Flood Hazard Maps and Flood Insurance Studies.

To request an SRP, the Chief Executive Officer of a community or authorized representative completes an SRP Request Form and submits it to FEMA during the time periods outlined above. Once FEMA confirms the appeal is eligible for an SRP, FEMA will forward the SRP Request form to NIBS to initiate the Panel selection process and develop a list of potential members.

Upon direction from FEMA to convene an SRP, NIBS identifies 10-15 pre-qualified members from its cadre of experts based on the technical and scientific expertise needed for each specific request. A Panel of 5 members is chosen from this list of pre-qualified experts. The community chooses 3 members, FEMA chooses the remaining 2.

OVERSIGHT

SRPs are organized, administered, and managed by the National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS) under contract with FEMA. NIBS is a non-profit organization independent from FEMA.

NIBS acts as the Panel Sponsor, coordinating the SRPs, ensuring that proper regulations and procedures are employed. NIBS identifies and maintains an independent cadre of scientific and technical experts in sciences that relate to creation of Flood Hazard Maps and Flood Insurance Studies. NIBS encourages experts in subject matter areas to apply via online form:

<http://www.floodsrp.org/apply/>.

Qualifications include at least 10 years professional experience, relevant college degrees, licenses, published research, and commitments of specified amounts of time.

NIBS will ensure that there is no conflict of interest amongst the panel members. NIBS will confirm that members do not reside in the state from which the appeal is taken and have no personal or professional interest in its findings of the appeal.

FUNDING SOURCES

SRPs are administered by the National Institute for Building Sciences under contract from FEMA.

Q: What “triggers” a review?

A: An SRP is convened when deemed necessary by FEMA or upon a joint agreement between FEMA and a community to review and resolve conflicting scientific and technical data submitted by a community challenging FEMA's proposed flood hazard data.

Q: How long does it take a product to be completed?

A: SRP must present its rationale and decision based on a simple majority vote of the 5 members in a report made available to FEMA and the community no later than 90 days after the data is brought to the Panel. This written decision denies or accepts the alternative flood hazard data submitted by a community.

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