

Remembering the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program's of yesterday.



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As those that flooded March and August of 2016 reach their 2nd year of waiting on word if they even qualify for a Hazard Mitigation Grant to elevate their homes we are reminded almost as often as the news tells us the weather that some of the issues and the people that caused the program to be nearly shut down in 2011 are still practicing rule making today.

Don't let me scare you, it's still early, you don't have your home elevated and your concrete foundation

cracking just yet and you haven't seen the engineering designs. Well, not that it matters, what engineer is going to review the design with you to make you sleep better at night.

Not only are you not going to be fully aware of everything that is going on, you have no idea of who really is doing the work since your first notice was “an engineering firm” was going to review your elevation project.

So let's jump to what is the biggest hurdle in this race to elevate before you are forced to move out of your camper and into an unfinished home. Yes, you may not be following the processes very closely but that's what you have me for.

I'll recap with you. Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) rules in Louisiana are to elevate the homes slab if the home has a slab on grade constructed home. Others that are slightly elevated on Pier and Beam do not run into issues with their continued elevation process.

Now, if you are using the Restore Louisiana process or should I say the CDBG-DR HUD Process you're going to find that they will not authorize you to elevate your slab and a home separation is out of the question as of this date. They offer you one option, to reconstruct a home on a built elevated platform.

What is wrong with the HUD program which comes by it's rules on a state level within the Office of Community Development Disaster Recovery Unit is it selected the most expensive method of elevation you can choose. Give a call to any home elevation company in the state and they will agree with me that elevating a slab costs less than separating a home from the slab and elevating and much less than demolishing your old home building a platform and reconstructing a new home on time.

Seems the State of Louisiana Office of Community Development that manages the Community Development Block Grants in times of Disaster has expensive tastes in home elevation.

Or could it be that the same person that managed the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program in 2011 is still making it difficult for homeowners to have 100% satisfaction.

Yes, you guessed it, Mr. Patrick Forbes our Current Executive Director of our Restore LA program was also the Executive Director managing Katrina Elevations that caused 7 companies to be reviewed, 7 companies to be suspended and rule changes that only made the costs of elevation go up without quality increases or engineering controls put into place.

It appears that all the rules from 2010 added with the rules from 2017 make it nearly impossible for homeowners to elevate their disaster homes with any program offered today.

When we review we find Reports published on Nola.Com regarding contractor fraud.

“The contractor, Gregg Huskey of Celebrity Contractors, did the work without following an engineer's plans, according to an independent engineering report Self commissioned last September.” (Reference #a)

We have the same management today as we did when the Shaw Group handled what IEM Inc. is handling today. Are we facing the same type of fraud? Maybe our fraud isn't really fraud but more of a limited scope of work that the state is willing to do that eliminates most contractors in the running for HMGP grants.

Is it state managed programs that provide the feeding ground for companies and individuals to practice and pursue the path of least resistance even if it involves fraudulent activities fraud?

When Orleans Shoring (owner:) provided tapes to Patrick Forbes for review that lead to Mr. Forbes suspending each contractor from the states list of approved HMGP contractors without notice can we trust

the judgment of future issues similar to this? When is it criminal for a competitor to secretly record rehearsed processes posing as a customer with the knowledge you are going to work until you can show some legal issue or line has been crossed then report it directly to the director of the grant program?

"When you're dealing with a company that obviously has a financial interest in trying to push other companies out of the market, you have to have those tapes verified as being legitimate tapes," said Sen. JP Morrell. (Ref. #2)

(Referencing Forbes in Ref. #3 WAFB)

In June 2011, they said contractors had to finish a project within a timely manner: 180 days for an elevation and 360 days for a project from scratch. In September 2011, contractors had to be licensed and warrant their work for the next five years. But it's what came in November 2011 - bonding requirements saying all projects now have to be backed by bonding companies - that's got small contractors up in arms.

"Right now, I'm totally shut down as far as new projects. I'm totally shut down, I can't write anything because I can't produce," said Brimmer Construction Services, LLC owner Charles Brimmer.

"To get a bond, it's not the easiest thing in the world especially for smaller companies. You need a lot of capital to get bonded. Smaller companies just don't have that," said Ed Keenan, owner of EA Keenan, LLC.

"Applicants, their advocates and the contractors who hope to get paid with the mitigation money are having trouble understanding ever-changing rules, getting clear answers to their questions and even confirming whether the state has properly recorded who wants a share of the \$750 million in grants."

"So far, the program has paid fewer than 300 homeowners a total of \$6.7 million in two years."

(Nola.com)

The article in Nola.Com Ref. #4 is part of the \$750 million awarded to elevate homes after Katrina. This is 5 and 6 years later and still the program moves slowly and rules are changed that seem to confuse even its own internal employees.

Training then seems to be as it is today at times. Nothing really different, "We are reviewing your case" sounds the same as "Program is on Hold".

Paying Contractors needs to be one of the top priorities and has made some great strides when you compare it to the 2011 issues.

But if we can't manage to inspect a job and cut a check in less than 14 days we need to stop paying \$100 million per year contracts to companies paid to pay others.

I would guess IEM Inc. would shut down services in 5 days if the state missed a payment to them. I can honestly say this because IEM Inc outsources nearly all the work or temp sources it. That's many smaller contractors that may not stay onboard with them if they didn't pay on time.

Granted they have a deep credit line, but my point is our contractors doing the work need to be paid quickly so homeowners can be free from this nightmare of a disaster recovery group.

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News reporter David Hammer of NOLA.Com shared an interview and his research that I have not validated nor have I seen anything from the OCD-DRU group or HMGP offering \$130/sf for home replacement costs.

"One applicant from Metairie, who declined to give his name because he is afraid of undermining his appeal, found out recently that FEMA set his eligible reconstruction costs at less than \$80 per square foot based on his home's larger size. Because the total amount he's received from Road Home, an SBA disaster loan and insurance proceeds exceeds \$80 per square foot, he's been ruled ineligible for a hazard mitigation grant to pay his actual costs of rebuilding.

The Road Home, incidentally, set replacement costs at \$130 per square foot for all destroyed homes, regardless of size.

" (Ref. #4)

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By David Hammer, The Times-Picayune

Follow on Twitter <http://twitter.com/davidhammerTP>

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Additional resources

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