

FALLBROOK: Pala revising hazard prevention plans to ensure FEMA funding

Updated document due for completion in April

By TOM PFINGSTEN - Staff Writer | Tuesday, February 17, 2009 4:09 PM PST [∞](#)

FALLBROOK ---- Officials in Pala said Tuesday that they are working to update a hazard and safety plan for the Federal Emergency Management Agency that ensures the tribe's ability to receive federal assistance for disaster relief and prevention.

Known as a "Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan," the lengthy document identifies potential threats to the 650 members of the Pala band of Mission Indians who live on the reservation straddling Highway 76 between Fallbrook and Valley Center.

The plan takes into account how tribal facilities, roadways and homes may be affected by uncontrollable threats such as earthquakes and floods, said Jamie Caplan, a Massachusetts consultant who is coordinating the plan's revisions.

The federal agency, also known as FEMA, requires state governments to have hazard plans on file in order to qualify for funding on an array of disaster preparedness measures, officials said.

The rule comes from the "Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000," and under the guidelines, American Indian tribes are treated as states and thus are required to file individual plans.

"Once a plan is approved by FEMA, it's an ongoing thing ---- you have strategies you set forth, and you're responsible to follow those strategies," said James Fournier, a geographic information specialist with the tribe. "We hope to be done by April."

Caplan said the purpose of the plan is to identify weaknesses in infrastructure that may cause safety problems during a disaster or other hazardous event, and work toward fixing those weaknesses.

"We look at all the infrastructure on the reservation ---- all water mains, bridges, buildings, everything that's there," said Caplan. "(Then) we can model what will happen to that infrastructure during a disaster. For example, what if there's an earthquake or a flood on the reservation?"

She said the busy Pala Casino and Resort structures are covered in the plan.

"They are compliant, they're very safe, and they are included in the plan," she said, adding that she perceived the tribe to be highly concerned with the soundness of its gaming facilities. "They care tremendously about the casino, because that's their biggest asset. It's their number one priority."

The first version of Pala's multi-hazard plan was filed with the federal government in 2006.

Since then, all structures have been built in compliance with earthquake ordinances and other county building codes, and the tribe has taken other steps to shore up how well its 1,100 members are prepared for an emergency, said Caplan.

"Through this whole process, we include the members of the tribal community," she said. "They provide the hands-on expertise. Because they're living right there, they could say, 'This road always washes out, we need to fix this.' "

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