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Reducing Coastal Risk on the East and Gulf Coasts

Engineering, and Planning: Coastal Risk Reduction Committee on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Water Resources Science, Water Science and Technology Board, Ocean Studies Board, Division on Earth and Life Studies, National Research Council

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Hurricane- and coastal-storm-related losses have increased substantially during the past century, largely due to increases in population and development in the most susceptible coastal areas. Climate change poses additional threats to coastal communities from sea level rise and possible increases in strength of the largest hurricanes. Several large cities in the United States have extensive assets at risk to coastal storms, along with countless smaller cities and developed areas. The devastation from Superstorm Sandy has heightened the nation's awareness of these vulnerabilities. What can we do to better prepare for and respond to the increasing risks of loss?

Reducing Coastal Risk on the East and Gulf Coasts reviews the coastal risk-reduction strategies and levels of protection that have been used along the United States East and Gulf Coasts to reduce the impacts of coastal flooding associated with storm surges. This report evaluates their effectiveness in terms of economic return, protection of life safety, and minimization of environmental effects. According to this report, the vast majority of the funding for coastal risk-related issues is provided only after a disaster occurs. This report calls for the development of a national vision for coastal risk management that includes a long-term view, regional solutions, and recognition of the full array of economic, social, environmental, and life-safety benefits that come from risk reduction efforts. To support this vision, *Reducing Coastal Risk* states that a national coastal risk assessment is needed to identify those areas with the greatest risks that are high priorities for risk reduction efforts. The report discusses the implications of expanding the extent and levels of coastal storm surge protection in terms of operation and maintenance costs and the availability of resources.

Reducing Coastal Risk recommends that benefit-cost analysis, constrained by acceptable risk criteria and other important environmental and social factors, be used as a framework for evaluating national investments in coastal risk reduction. The recommendations of this report will assist engineers, planners and policy makers at national, regional, state, and local levels to move from a nation that is primarily reactive to coastal disasters to one that invests wisely in coastal risk reduction and builds resilience among coastal communities.

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