



## Steele County Endeavors to Become Disaster-Resistant

### Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

#### *Steele County, Minnesota*

**Steele County, MN** - The winds blow hard across the farmlands and small towns of Steele County in southern Minnesota. Along with planting season comes tornado and storm season. The mostly rural county has experienced three presidentially declared disasters in the 1990s.



In 1998, funds were made available to Steele County through the FEMA Project Impact pre-disaster mitigation program. This program focuses on helping communities protect themselves from the destructiveness of natural disasters by taking preventive action before a severe storm hits.

Steele County became the first Minnesota recipient awarded funds from this program. The Minnesota Division of Emergency Management (DEM) identified Steele County as a logical choice because of the on-going safety and emergency preparedness activities already promoted in the County. Steele County had established partnerships between industry, the public sector and citizens through a 10-year-old organization concerned with health and safety called Community Awareness & Emergency Response (CAER) and an industry-supported Safety Council. FEMA's mitigation program encourages private sector participation as an important component in creating a disaster-resistant community.

A planning committee composed of emergency responders, industry partners and committed citizens formed to develop a unifying vision on how to best use the \$500,000 grant and to implement a preparedness strategy.

The two-pronged approach of the nine-member committee focused on implementing a community outreach campaign to create awareness about how people can protect themselves against storms, and helping those who were most vulnerable to storms in the area - manufactured home residents.

With the grant money in hand, the Steele County mitigation committee aggressively and creatively marketed its message of preparedness to all residents of the county, young and old, in town and on the farm. Sub-committees met monthly to determine priorities in the following program areas: Communications Systems, Training and Education, Mitigation Strategies for Structures and Hazard Inventory and Infrastructure Mitigation.

Project Impact Coordinator Shirley Woodfill worked with the committee to implement the public outreach and administer the grant money.

Members of the planning committee formed a speaker's bureau and conducted presentations on storm preparedness at community events and for community groups. More than fifty presentations were made throughout the county, reaching a combined total audience of more than 1500.

In the midst of the public awareness campaign, First Alert offered a "50% off" promotion on NOAA Weather Radios for residents of Minnesota. Woodfill and the planning committee felt confident their preparedness message was reaching county residents when they learned that more than 25% of the Minnesotans who ordered the NOAA weather radios were residents of Steele County.

Steele County invented numerous communication pathways to educate both businesses and individuals in regards to storm preparedness and mitigation activities. The county's diverse and creative approach to pre-disaster mitigation planning provided its citizens and businesses the tools to protect themselves in future storm events. Partnerships forged during the grant implementation time frame will enable the community outreach and preparedness education programs to continue long beyond the two-year performance period.

### Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County (County-wide)**

FEMA Region: **Region V**

State: **Minnesota**

County: **Steele County**

### Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Private**

Hazard Type: **Severe Storm; Tornado**

Activity/Project Type: **Education/Outreach/Public Awareness**

Activity/Project Start Date: **01/1998**

Activity/Project End Date: **Ongoing**

Funding Source: **Mitigation Planning**

### Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**

### Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal  
Disaster? **Unknown**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Unknown**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

### Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: <http://www.noaa.gov/tornadoes.html>

Reference URL 2: <http://www.hsem.state.mn.us/>

## Main Points

- In 1998, funds were made available to Steele County through the FEMA Project Impact pre-disaster mitigation program.
- A planning committee composed of emergency responders, industry partners and committed citizens formed to develop a unifying vision on how to best use the \$500,000 grant and to implement a preparedness strategy.
- The two-pronged approach of the nine-member committee focused on implementing a community outreach campaign to create awareness about how people can protect themselves against storms, and helping those who were most vulnerable to storms in the area - manufactured home residents.



Shelters protect park residents during high-wind events