



## RESEARCH BRIEF SERIES

# MITIGATION MATTERS

## AWARD RECIPIENTS

SAYMA KHAJEHEI

University of Utah

DIVYA CHANDRASEKHAR

University of Utah

AWARD AMOUNT:

\$2,500

*FEMA defines mitigation as the effort to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters. Effective mitigation requires that we all understand local risks and invest in long-term planning to reduce risks and enhance community well-being.*

## PRE-DISASTER RECOVERY PLANNING FOR PUBLIC HOUSING IN SALT LAKE COUNTY, UTAH

### SUMMARY

Pre-disaster mitigation and response plans can improve the efficacy and efficiency of post-disaster recovery in communities at risk from natural hazards. But without direct experience of a disaster, such communities may not have the required knowledge or motivation to prepare such plans. This cycle of being unprepared, yet not experienced enough to prepare, can severely undermine the recovery of communities when disasters inevitably strike. The stakes are even higher for socially vulnerable community members, such as public housing residents, who may not have enough private resources to compensate for inadequate government preparedness and response.

This research examines the challenges and opportunities of pre-disaster planning for public housing recovery using the case study of Salt Lake County, Utah, which could experience a high-magnitude earthquake in the next 50 years but has not experienced one in recent history. Methods for this study included analyzing seven public housing plans, eight hazard mitigation plans, two disaster preparedness plans, and four disaster response plans adopted by Salt Lake County and its 16 constituent cities as the archival research. Ten semi-structured, open-ended key informant interviews were then conducted with public officials. Study findings show that in pre-disaster planning for public housing recovery is challenged by organizational and funding capacity, leadership, and lack of trust. It can, however, be promoted through the creative use of financing, public education, joint action plans, and using smaller-scale disasters to catalyze



*Public housing residents in Salt Lake County could be without permanent homes after a large-scale disaster, such as an earthquake. Image Credit: Housing Authority of Salt Lake City.*

change. This study calls for action in at-risk communities to conduct pre-disaster planning for post-disaster public housing recovery.

### KEY FINDINGS

Pre-planning for public housing recovery is challenged by the lack of pre-disaster assessments, poor coordination and information-sharing, lack of dedicated funding resources, poor leadership, and issues of trust.

Opportunities for pre-disaster planning for public housing recovery include expanding existing small-scale emergency plans,

using existing funds more creatively, developing joint plans for post-disaster public housing recovery, community education on the importance of pre-disaster planning for recovery, and reviewing existing response and recovery protocols.

Even minor post-disaster response and recovery experiences can provide significant opportunities for institutional learning and raising awareness and motivation to do pre-disaster housing recovery planning. At-risk communities would be wise to carefully consider their actions in these moments and use these opportunities to improve their preparedness for the “big one.”

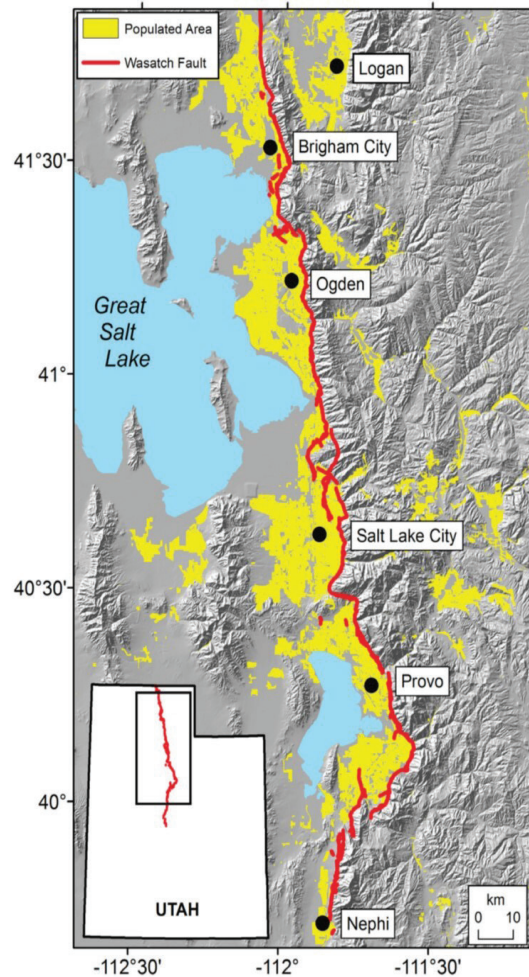
## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Communities can promote pre-disaster planning for public housing recovery by developing joint plans with other city organizations, involving diverse communities in planning processes, allocating funds for public housing planning, educating the public about mitigation savings, and taking advantage of opportunities to conduct a review of existing response and recovery protocols. Disasters can sometimes be leveraged as a motivator for at-risk communities to conduct such pre-disaster planning.

Actions to raise awareness of the importance of public housing recovery to the community will aid in the investment of community resources in pre-disaster planning and improve recovery outcomes for public housing recovery residents in the aftermath.

## STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders who may find this work interesting includes federal, state, and local disaster management agencies, preparedness and city planners, state and local housing departments, community leaders and advocates for housing resiliency.



*Salt Lake City and County are located along the Wasatch Fault which could experience a large-magnitude earthquake in the next 50 years.  
Image Credit: Earthquake Engineering Research Institute, 2015.*

Full report: Khajehei, S. & Chandrasekhar, D. (2021). Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning for Public Housing in Salt Lake County, Utah. Natural Hazards Center Mitigation Matters Grant Report Series, 6. Boulder, CO: Natural Hazards Center, University of Colorado Boulder. Available at: : <https://hazards.colorado.edu/mitigation-mattersreport/the-art-of-getting-by>



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University of Colorado Boulder

Natural Hazards Center  
Institute of Behavioral Science | University of Colorado Boulder

1440 15th Street | Boulder, CO 80309-0483 USA  
hazctr@colorado.edu | (303) 492-6818

[hazards.colorado.edu](https://hazards.colorado.edu)