



## Partners in Prevention

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### Despite Proven Benefits, Freeboard's Future in Louisiana Code Still Uncertain

The term “freeboard” is handed down from nautical engineering, used to describe the distance between the deck of a ship and the waterline. The higher the freeboard, the more protected the vessel from taking on water. The application of freeboard in home construction is no different.

That’s why a coalition of partners, including the Association of State Floodplain Managers, FLASH, and Louisiana State University joined FEMA when they were invited to address the [Louisiana State Uniform Construction Code Council](#) (LSUCC) on October 11 in Baton Rouge. The delegation’s message was clear, the one-foot freeboard requirement in the 2015 International Residential Code (IRC) should be preserved, not removed, especially in flood-prone states like Louisiana.

In August, catastrophic flooding in East Baton Rouge provided compelling data in favor of the freeboard requirement. According to HUD data, more than 24,000 of the approximately 85,000 substantially-damaged homes endured flooding of one foot or less. If these homes had been constructed under the new freeboard requirement, 24,000 families would have avoided costly, disruptive, and life-altering damage.

“Maintaining the IRC in its original state is important as it is developed through a deliberate, consensus process with input from all experts and sectors,” said FLASH SVP of Education & Technical Programs Mike Rimoldi. “Selectively eliminating portions of code can be costly and dangerous, especially with risks like flooding.”

While the decision to eliminate the freeboard provision seems all but done, a final vote is expected during the November 15 LSUCC meeting. And with Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards in Washington D.C. this week seeking additional flood relief dollars, perhaps Louisiana officials will reconsider this overlooked option to strengthen their state in future floods.