

BUILDING REGIONAL RESILIENCE TO WATER-RELATED HAZARDS IN THE CHARLESTON, SC
REGION:
A CHARLESTON RESILIENCE NETWORK INITIATIVE

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Charleston, South Carolina, is well-known nationally and internationally not only for its beauty, charm, and high-ranking tourist destination, but also for its low-lying location and vulnerability to sea level rise and other coastal hazards. Sea level in Charleston Harbor has risen one foot in the past century, and nuisance flooding at high tide is becoming a more frequent occurrence, forcing streets to close and impacting public and private property and infrastructure. As a result, there has been increasing interest at the local, state, and federal levels to address these issues in the Charleston region, but finding the most productive and efficient way to work together across levels of government and among the public and private sectors typically requires a coordinating body. In June 2014, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Infrastructure Protection (DHS/IP) hosted a climate-hazard adaptation exercise in Charleston. Working in partnership with FEMA and NOAA and guided by a planning team of regional and local representative stakeholder organizations, DHS/IP engaged public officials, managers and private sector owner/operators of critical infrastructure to examine the effects that climate-related hazards, such as relative sea level rise, precipitation extremes, heat and coastal storms, have on critical infrastructure and to evaluate organizational and regional resilience. Stemming from the DHS/IP exercise, the Charleston Resilience Network (CRN) began to coalesce as Charleston-based governmental organizations worked to align existing strategies and resources to address stakeholder needs for resilience planning. The CRN is a locally-driven initiative supported by the City of Charleston, Charleston County, the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments, S.C. Sea Grant Consortium, S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, Charleston Water System and SCANA Corporation. Collectively, these organizations have the authorities and programmatic capacity necessary to develop localized hazard vulnerability analysis, engage stakeholders and promote the implementation of resilience actions. The CRN is working to foster a unified strategy and provide a forum to share science-based information, educate stakeholders and enhance long-term planning decisions that result in resilience.

Subsequent to the DHS/IP Exercise, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) selected Charleston as a focus city for their efforts to foster localized strategies to improve resilience to episodic disasters and chronic hazards. CRN engagement with the NAS enhances professional communication networks and leverages the technical resources and planning expertise of the CRN member organizations to develop and promote a more unified resilience strategy in the Charleston region. This talk will describe the steps taken to establish the CRN, provide an overview of the network's strategic outlook and progress, and discuss the network's short- and long-term goals for resilience planning and implementation in the region. Most importantly, this talk will share insights and perspectives on the relationships that have been developed among the network's partners and with other entities at the local, state, and national levels interested in resilience issues in Charleston.