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Contact: Ken Topping
805-756-2124
805-305-8710 cell
ktopping@calpoly.edu

Ray Ladd
805-756-7432
rladd@calpoly.edu

Cal Poly Revising State Plan to Reduce Catastrophes

SAN LUIS OBISPO - Cal Poly's City and Regional Planning Department now has a crucial role in helping the state prevent losses from major disasters, such as wildfires, earthquakes and floods.

The university has been selected by the Governor's Office of Emergency Services to revise the California State Hazard Mitigation Plan under a contract of more than three-quarter million dollars.

The \$762,894 contract with OES authorizes the City and Regional Planning Department to update the plan so California will continue to be eligible for federal disaster assistance funding.

"Protecting California's people and property is the goal," said Department Head, William Siembieda. "The state has chosen to use the expertise of Cal Poly's nationally ranked planning program to help plan for a safer California."

The Cal Poly team will also bring the safety plan to an "enhanced" level. This could mean hundred of millions more in hazard mitigation grant funding for California in future federally-declared disasters.

"The selection of Cal Poly City and Regional Planning Department to undertake this important work is a reflection of leadership in safe development practices exercised by our faculty," according to Tom Jones, dean of the College of Architecture and Environmental Design.

The project will be headed by a three-person Cal Poly City and Regional Planning Department faculty team. Ken Topping will serve as project director, with William Siembieda and Mike Boswell as co-directors.

They will be supported by faculty from other colleges and departments, including Chris Dicus, professor of Forestry and Natural Resources, and Rakesh Goel, professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, together with a project assistant and a team of four graduate student researchers.

The final Enhanced State Mitigation Plan must be approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency by October 2007.

The existing State Mitigation Plan was approved by FEMA in October 2004. Under the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, state mitigation plans must be updated every three years in order to accommodate new threats and hazard conditions.

The State Mitigation Plan focuses on ways to strengthen public safety by reducing vulnerability and risk of natural and human-caused hazards such as earthquakes, floods, and wildfires. Its goal is to increase the resilience of California communities to withstand damages from major natural catastrophes through better development planning and land use planning.

"No community is immune from a catastrophic disaster. We learned that from Hurricane Katrina. We must address safety issues in land use, construction quality, and capital improvements before, not after, a catastrophic event," according to Ken Topping, of Cal Poly's City and Regional Planning Department.

Project work includes reviewing the 2004 Mitigation Plan to determine needed changes under new FEMA guidelines. It also involves evaluating local hazard mitigation plans prepared by more than 200 local governments to determine potential linkages with the state plan, and reaching out to local government, business and professional associations, and the

general public to solicit useful ideas for making communities safer.

"Building safely in the right places is an important theme of this work," said Siembieda, department head of the City and Regional Planning Department.

The project directors all have significant expertise in the area of designing disaster resistant communities. Ken Topping is former Los Angeles city planning director, visiting professor at Kyoto University Disaster Prevention Research Institute, co-author of *Planning for Post-Event Recovery and Reconstruction* published by FEMA and the American Planning Association in 1998, and recently served on a panel invited by the Greater New Orleans Foundation to select the 16 planning firms now preparing a Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) with a grant of \$3.5 million grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

William Siembieda served as lead consultant for the legal and institutional sections of the Mitigation and Prepared Plan for the Caracas Metropolitan District. Completed in 2004, this multi-hazard mitigation plan for Caracas, Venezuela is the first of its kind in Latin America.

Michael Boswell has disaster mitigation experience based on state and local government planning practice in Florida before becoming a professor, with special expertise in topics such as hurricane mitigation, disaster loss estimation, adaptive management and governance, local government planning and decision-making, and sustainable development.

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Cal Poly Public Affairs
California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407
805.756.7266
polynews@calpoly.edu