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PREPPING for a pandemic

Area employers, hospitals brace for H1N1 outbreak

FORT WAYNE – An H1N1 flu pandemic poses more than a health care crisis. It's also a business challenge.

Area hospitals, clinics and doctors' offices are gearing up for a surge of patients by stocking up on supplies, reviewing staffing levels and making contingency plans for treating more patients than current capacity allows.

But health care providers aren't the only ones facing the flu challenge. Local businesses, with the help of hospital and government officials, are also reviewing their pandemic readiness.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates the potential U.S. economic losses from the next influenza pandemic at \$71.3 billion to \$166.5 billion. The World Health Organization declared H1N1 flu a pandemic – or global outbreak – in June. The strain is sometimes referred to as swine flu.

The CDC is tracking the spread of H1N1. Indiana was one of 27 states listed last week with "widespread" flu activity, the highest rating given. State officials estimate at least 6,000 Hoosiers were infected as of Sept. 1. Indiana's population is 6.38 million.

Local business and non-profit leaders are taking notice. More than 100 people representing 65 organizations attended the Allen County Business Preparedness Summit late last month, said John Silcox, spokesman for the Fort Wayne-Allen County Department of Health.

The list included manufacturers, engineering firms, banks, consultants and transportation companies as well as numerous non-profits, including libraries.

Among the issues business leaders need to consider are who can step in if critical employees, suppliers or contractors are too sick to work, according to recommendations issued by the Indiana Department of Homeland Security and the Indiana Department of Labor.

If you can't make your product without a steady source of raw materials, it's wise to find alternate suppliers in case your primary source is forced to close temporarily because of widespread employee illness. If possible, substitute teleconferences for in-person business meetings and allow some workers to telecommute.

Also, plan for absenteeism and make sure payroll can be processed, the departments advise.

Hospitals and other health care providers have been preparing to be the epicenter of flu activity. The local health department is in "constant communication" with area hospitals about H1N1 flu and other emergency preparedness issues, Silcox said.

"This is not something that just dates back to the spring when H1N1 came up on the radar," he said.

Joe Dorko, Lutheran Hospital's CEO, and Betty Brown, Parkview Health's chief quality and patient safety officer, said their organizations have prepared for such a health crisis for years, updating existing plans to prepare for potential Avian flu and SARS outbreaks that didn't materialize locally.

Lutheran officials made plans for mass casualties and skyrocketing patient demand during the anthrax scare in late 2001 and have tweaked the strategy each year, depending on the current situation, Dorko said.

Both local hospital groups are following state and federal flu vaccination guidelines, which strongly recommend immunization for Indiana health care workers. If the guidelines change, so will local policies, officials said.

Hospitals and doctors' offices realize that some staff might become patients – or at least be forced to take time off work to recover from flu or care for a sick child.

Health care providers have to invest in more than H1N1 and seasonal vaccine doses. Lutheran Hospital has spent about \$200,000 on other supplies to stop the spread of the highly contagious and potentially deadly H1N1 virus, Dorko said. Buying the necessary provisions – including masks and gowns – requires shuffling budgets to cover the expense.

The good news is the hospital routinely uses the face masks and gowns to slow the spread of infectious diseases, he said. If Lutheran doesn't see the surge of flu patients it expects, staff can use the supplies in coming months for the hospital's usual needs.

Lutheran is owned by a subsidiary of Franklin, Tenn.-based Community Health Systems. Being part of an organization that owns, operates or leases 122 hospitals in 29 states allows Lutheran Health Network's eight separately licensed hospitals to requisition supplies from sister hospitals in parts of the country that aren't hit hard by an outbreak, Dorko said.

Fort Wayne-based Parkview Health has had some trouble finding enough face masks for the non-profit health system, Brown said. But the hospitals joined to place orders as a group, easing the shortage situation, she said.

Parkview has also reviewed its campuses to identify space that could temporarily be converted into patient rooms and vacant land that could hold mobile units for the same reason, Brown said.

With supplies and beds in order, hospital and doctors' offices are making sure they have enough employees to treat patients.

Dr. Jim Stapel, Parkview Physicians' Group's chief medical officer, said part of the group's pandemic flu plan calls for closing certain offices and pooling resources if staff absences reach critical levels that interfere with patient care.

"We have to be very nimble. We have to react very quickly," he said.

Many nurses and other health care providers work part time, Dorko said. In a health crisis, they can be called on to work more hours than usual. The hospital doesn't have to budget for extra salary, he said, because officials match staff hours to patient volume. Higher patient volume generates more income to cover payroll.

Officials for both health care organizations said staff members observe daily cleaning rituals that decrease the spread of infection.

Parkview and Lutheran schedule Monday morning calls with local affiliates to track the spread of H1N1 and seasonal flu and allow them to respond to the viruses.

"Every day," Dorko said, "we wake up prepared to handle an influx of patients."

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Agencies aim to wipe out flu threat

By Roger McBain

Sunday, October 11, 2009

The soft toys have left the children's areas at Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library's eight locations, and the hard toys get sanitized after every story hour.

And throughout all the libraries, staff members this week will begin sanitizing computers, tables, counters and other places routinely that hands and fingers spend a lot of time at, says Amy Mangold, marketing and communications director for the Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library.

The prospect of a swine flu pandemic has libraries, businesses, schools, emergency service providers, manufacturers, government agencies and organizations of all kinds in Evansville and across the nation rethinking how they do things.

By most estimates, swine flu will pose significantly greater dangers than the normal seasonal flu, which typically kills 36,000 Americans per year and hospitalizes more than 200,000, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

President Barack Obama's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology has warned that a swine flu outbreak in the U.S. could claim up to 90,000 lives, overwhelming public health care systems.

In addition to the human toll, a swine flu pandemic could hammer business, industry and the nation's economy, perhaps tripling the estimated \$10 billion seasonal flu costs the nation in lost productivity and direct medical expenses, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

That's why federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the CDC and the Small Business Administration are helping state and local organizations come up with practices and policies to minimize the impact of swine flu.

They've put together recommendations for individuals, businesses, government agencies and schools at www.flu.gov.

The guidelines include the basics, such as providing hand disinfectants, educating people about the importance of routine personal and institutional hygiene, providing access to vaccinations and making sure flu sufferers leave the workplace and get proper treatment.

Beyond that, the recommendations offer ideas about cross-training employees to cover for those who are ill or at home taking care of sick children and expanding telecommuting functions for those able to work from home.

Like the Evansville libraries, other companies, agencies and organizations have incorporated many of those recommendations in preparing for the swine flu here.

At Vectren, a public utility company whose 1,900 employees provide gas and electricity to more than a million people in two states, "our number one priority is to make sure our customers have reliable and safe power," said Chase Kelley, the company's director of communications.

Vectren has provided hand disinfectant throughout its facilities, and it has stepped up cleaning in all high-traffic, public areas, including conference rooms, break rooms and vending machine areas, Kelley said.

"We're cleaning daily things like doorknobs, counters and areas people access with fingers and hands," she said.

The company is offering free seasonal flu shots and will work with the Vanderburgh County Health Department to make sure employees — especially those in the most critical jobs delivering power to customers — have the opportunity to get swine flu vaccinations, she said.

Training to cover vacancies

And Vectren has put together a "supervisor's tool kit" to make sure people have cross training in other's jobs. Vectren already uses a system that allows a number of employees, including call center agents and managers, to work from home online.

Toyota Motor Manufacturing Indiana is following companywide policies put together by a corporate committee that's been meeting since March, said Kelly Dillon, TMMI's manager for public affairs and corporate compliance officer.

Toyota's efforts include monthly education messages to team leaders and conveniently placed hand sanitizer stations.

"And we have also doubled surface-cleaning efforts," she said.

The company provides free flu vaccinations and "we have the ability to test for Influenza A on site," she said.

The Evansville Vanderburgh School Corp. is employing preventive measures and looking at alternative educational approaches, and exploring how high school students might be able to continue classes from home using their netbooks, said Marsha Jackson, EVSC's communications director.

Fire Department ready to disinfect

The Evansville Fire Department has worked with the Health Department to receive vaccinations for seasonal flu, and they'll do the same with swine flu vaccinations, said Tony Knight, the department's emergency services coordinator.

None of the department's 14 hose houses, where most of the department's 274 active firefighters eat, sleep and work on 24-hour shifts, has experienced a flu outbreak this season, but each house keeps microbiological disinfectants on hand in case a facility had to be disinfected.

And all of the department's fire and rescue units are equipped with medical exam gloves, protective nose-and-mouth masks and protective suits in case firefighters need to treat someone with flulike symptoms, Knight said.

The department also monitors information from the Health Department and the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, which has assessed 10 regions around the state for their swine flu preparedness.

That assessment looked at a variety of factors, including the availability of things such as face masks, ventilators, intensive care unit beds and regular hospital beds, said Knight, "and this district ranks among the top throughout the entire state."



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October 9, 2009

Muncie workplaces buying 'hand sanitizer by the case'

Workplaces are dealing with the flu by telling employees to wash their hands -- and stay home if they're sick.

By KEITH ROYSDON

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MUNCIE -- Hand sanitizer is a hot commodity and local workplaces are bracing for the worst as the flu season -- complicated by worries about the H1N1 virus -- hits Muncie.

"We've been buying hand sanitizer by the case," said Karla Hostetler, chief executive officer of Central Indiana Orthopedics. "And there's some panic we're going to run out of them. Being in medicine we have them all over, and our physicians wash their hands between patients but we've just upped the ante."

As local H1N1 vaccinations begin for health-care workers and emergency personnel today, and news reports documenting the flu begin to sound like dispatches from a war zone, businesses find themselves dealing with worried employees and the prospect of operating with reduced staffing numbers due to illness.

<http://www.thestarpress.com/apps/pbcs.dll/section?category=videonet&videoID=1289095909>
target="_blank">Watch video report about H1N1 flu, seasonal flu

Bob Jones, administrator of the Delaware County Health Department, said employers face some serious questions.

"Can you operate with a third of your staff not here?" Jones asked. "What plans do you have in place? There's not an easy answer to how do I continue operations if half the office is sick. That goes back to planning. You may be able to reduce that risk somewhat with good practices."

Those practices, Jones said, include several that should be familiar to the public by now: Wash your hands frequently, sneeze into your sleeve rather than your hand and don't come to work if you're sick with flu-like symptoms.

Employees shouldn't come to work until well after any fever has disappeared, Jones said, recommending that people ask their health-care provider for an all-clear.

For workplaces like Central Indiana Orthopedics, response to H1N1 and seasonal flu means bolstering an already-high level of cleanliness and illness-prevention precautions and emphasizing that workers should stay home when they're sick.

"We have told our staff, if you have any flu-like symptoms, stay home," Hostetler said. "We're very supportive. Most of our employees want to come back to work and serve our patients, but we're using extra precautions."

That includes hand sanitizer and even paper masks "presented in a respectful manner" to someone who's coughing, she said.

Companies that sell hand sanitizer and other cleaning products find business is brisk.

"We are selling a lot of hand sanitizer," said Sue Dalton, owner of Dalton & Co. Professional Cleaning Supply. "The supply is very short. I have an order in for 200 cases for Ball State but they won't get those in until December because Purell is so far behind."

Dalton -- who has three pages of flu information and products on her company's Web site -- said she has enough to serve regular customers because she started stocking up in the summer.

Besides maintaining cleanliness standards and encouraging employees to stay home when they're already sick, authorities are encouraging businesses to take other steps, including the consideration of "social distancing," Jones said.

According to the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, social distancing includes "limiting face-to-face meetings utilizing Web or tele-conference meetings."

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Ind. fire marshal warns of heating dangers

Associated Press

[October 10, 2009](#)

INDIANAPOLIS -

State Fire Marshal Jim Greeson is warning Indiana residents to heat their homes properly as the weather gets cooler to avoid the risk of fires.

Greeson says heating equipment accounted for nearly 10 percent of all home fires last year and was involved in more than 600 such fires.

He says people should never use an oven to heat their homes and should take precautions with other heat sources. He reminds people that space heaters need space and that other combustibles such as curtains, blankets and clothing should be kept at least three feet away.

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Firefighters using new technology to keep people safe

By **MATT THACKER**

Matt.Thacker@newsandtribune.com

October 09, 2009 06:45 pm

— Fire departments across the country are urging people to “Stay Fire Smart! Don’t Get Burned” as part of the National Fire Protection Association’s annual Fire Prevention Week. This year’s campaign is focused on ways to keep homes safe and prevent painful burns. Local fire safety experts say new technology has led to major advancements in saving lives and preventing serious injuries.

Lt. Andre Heal, of the Charlestown Fire Department, said that until the 1980s when air packs became more available, firefighters could not go inside burning homes.

In addition to not having oxygen, Heal said that gear also did not protect firefighters’ entire bodies.

“Our gear is a little more durable now,” he said.

Another valuable piece of technology, Heal said, is thermal imaging cameras that can allow them to see fires in a completely dark smoke-filled room.

“If they may have been overcome by fire or smoke inhalation, we can search for people who haven’t made it out,” he said.

More technology can alert firefighters of a potentially dangerous part of the house.

The Georgetown and Lafayette Township fire departments use a system called SuperPASS. Firefighters wear a device that will sound an alarm if a firefighter is inside a structure too long or excessive heat is detected. It allows officials to know exactly what part of a house a possibly injured firefighter is in, said Don Allen, assistant chief for Lafayette Township.

Craig Treadway, executive of sales for Dallmann Systems, Inc., says more sophisticated fire alarm systems in companies make it easier to immediately pinpoint where the fire began.

“We can know exactly where the origin of the fire is,” he said.

Dallmann, with headquarters at 1247 Bridgeport Dr., began in the 1970s installing residential alarm systems but now focus more on installing and cleaning systems for large buildings.

Treadway says other products include heat detectors that recognize the rate of increase of a temperature and set off an alarm. That system is important for places where there is a lot of smoke that would frequently trigger a regular alarm system.

Other alarm systems can play a recording with vocal commands instructing people in the building what to do, while others can be tied in with sprinkler systems.

Treadway said everyone should make sure their alarm system is cleaned out at least once a year, or more preferably, four times a year.

With Fire Prevention Week this week, members of the Lafayette Township Fire Department have been going to schools and preschools teaching children about fire safety.

“The kids are like sponges,” Allen said. “We’ll go back after not seeing them for two years, and

they'll remember what we told them.”

Allen said it is important for families to have fire drills at home so everyone in the family knows how to exit the home, and that families also need to have a meeting place outside far from the house, so parents can know if everyone made it out of the house safely.

He said it is to remember the ageless advice such as “stop, drop and roll” and crawling on the ground if there is a lot of smoke.

Approximately 3,000 people die each year as a result of home fires and burns, and more than 200,000 people have to go to hospital emergency rooms for burn injuries in the United States, according to the Indiana Fire Marshal.

“The most common types of burn injuries result from fire or flame burns, scalds and contact burns,” said Jim Greeson, Indiana State Fire Marshal and Indiana Department of Homeland Security Division of Fire and Building Safety Director, in a press release this week. “Burns are painful and can result in serious scarring and even death. When we take extra caution in our homes to ensure that the curling iron is out of children’s reach or pot handles are turned away from the edge of the stove, such injuries are entirely preventable.”

In Indiana, 78 people were killed in fires last year, and more than 6,300 home fires were reported. There were 106 reports of children burned from fireworks in Indiana last year.

Greeson also advises to use safety with alternative heating sources. Heating equipment was involved in 613 home structure fires last year, he said.

He advises only turning the heater on when someone is in the room, keeping the heater away from anything flammable, never using an extension cord and inspecting all equipment annually.

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Carroll County Comet

State Fire Marshal warns ‘Stay fire smart! Don’t get burned’

The statistics are staggering. Each year roughly 3,000 people die as a result of home fires and burns, and more than 200,000 individuals are seen in the nation’s emergency rooms for burn injuries. Indiana alone had 78 people killed in home fires in 2008 and fire departments responded to over 6,300 home fires. There were 106 reports of children burned from fireworks in Indiana last year.

That’s why Indiana’s State Fire Marshal is teaming up with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) for Fire Prevention Week 2009 – Oct. 4-10 – to urge residents to “Stay fire smart! Don’t get burned.”

This year’s campaign focuses on ways to keep homes fire safe and prevent painful burns. Additionally, fire safety educators will be teaching local residents how to plan and practice escape from a home in case a fire occurs.

“The most common types of burn injuries result from fire or flame burns, scalds and contact burns,” said Jim Greeson, Indiana State Fire Marshal and Indiana Department of Homeland Security Division of Fire and Building Safety Director. “Burns are painful and can result in serious scarring and even death. When we take extra caution in our homes to ensure that the curling iron is out of children’s reach or pot handles are turned away from the edge of the stove, such injuries are entirely preventable. Keeping our homes safe from fire and preventing devastating burn injuries is a healthy change we can make happen.”

By following simple safety rules, you can “Stay Fire Smart! Don’t Get Burned.”

- * Keep hot foods and liquids away from tables and counter edges so they cannot be pulled or knocked over.
- * Have a 3-foot “kid-free” zone around the stove.
- * Never hold a child in your arms while preparing hot food or drinking a hot beverage.
- * Be careful when using things that get hot such as curling irons, oven, irons, lamps, heaters.

* Install tamper-resistant receptacles to prevent a child from sticking an object in the outlet.

* Never leave a child alone in a room with a lit candle, portable heater, lit fireplace or stove, or where a hot appliance might be in use.

* Wear short or close-fitting sleeves when cooking.

* Set your hot water temperature no higher than 120 degrees.

* Install anti-scald valves on shower heads and faucets.

Fire Prevention Week is actively supported by fire departments across the country. For 85 years fire departments have observed Fire Prevention Week, making it the longest running public health and safety observance on record.

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Most fires are avoidable

Debbie Blank

October 07, 2009 08:48 am

— Batesville Fire Chief Todd Schutte worries that with the recession, more area residents may try alternative heating methods this winter, which could lead to an increase in chimney and portable heater blazes. The Indiana Department of Homeland Security offers safe heating tips (please see box on page 14) and other fire prevention tips on the Web site www.in.gov/dhs. Volunteers haven't responded to many house fires in the past two years, but 2009 produced two business incidents, a grease fire at China Wok July 13 and a lightning strike at KFC/Taco Bell Aug. 10.

During Fire Prevention Week Oct. 4-10, the chief advises local restaurant managers, "Make sure that you're keeping your kitchen area clean and your hood systems maintained."

He dreads winter blazes. "It gets bitter cold sometimes." While the fire offers some heat, once it's out, "there's nowhere to get warm." He recalls arriving back at the fire station and standing up uniforms, waiting for them to thaw out.

There's more work to be done once firefighters leave a scene. "Depending on the size of the fire and how much equipment we had out, it can take from one to three hours" to clean and store it. What can city residents do better to aid firefighters' efforts? While hydrants are rather "unsightly when you're trying to manicure a lawn," they must not be hidden behind shrubs or enclosures. The chief points out, "It's hard for us to locate them and hook up hoses to them." The city has an ordinance stating objects cannot be placed within 5 feet of hydrants.

Six or eight Batesville Volunteer Fire & Rescue Department members are making the rounds this week to remind citizens how to live through fires. Drills and alarm checks are taking place at all Batesville public and private schools. St. Louis and Jack and Jill preschool students have paid educational visits to the firehouse with St. Louis kindergartners through second-graders scheduled for Wednesday. "We also make a trip out to St. Andrews Health Campus that afternoon to talk to the seniors ... I hope we never, ever have an issue with one of the nursing homes" because of residents' decreased mobility.

The men will be giving tips at Batesville Primary School Thursday and Friday. Schutte reports, "We always focus on sitting down with their parents and coming up with a plan." He suggests to youth, "'Have a meeting place.' We give them some graph paper" so children can draw the house and yard layout and visualize how they will escape a burning structure.

"Make sure you stay low in the smoke," he advises. The traditional basics still are true: "Stop, drop and roll if your clothes are on fire. Make sure your house has address numbers on it. Call 911 in emergencies." To prevent kitchen scalds, he reminds students that pot handles should be turned inward on top of the stove so little ones can't pull the pots down on top of them.

Money is needed to purchase upgrades so volunteers can be more effective. Just like a year ago, "we've been working on some grants for handheld radios." He'd like each of the 25 members to

have one so help can be called in dangerous situations. The department has about 15 now. Two local entities have decided to help: Hill-Rom, \$5,000; and Ripley County Community Foundation, \$4,000. About \$10,000 is sought for the rest of the radios and accessories. In addition, when equipment breaks, it must be replaced and if there's a technology breakthrough, firefighters would like increase their skills. The chief wants to buy a state-of-the-art smokehouse costing around \$60,000 to replace the old one. The new version is set up like a classroom with house features. How to extinguish cooking and wastebasket fires and talk with a dispatcher after dialing 911 can be practiced. While BVFRD was denied a federal grant last year, "we're trying again."

To raise dollars, volunteers will host two major events in 2010, a February stillboard shoot and a two-day firemen's fest, which will be combined with SummerFest in July at Liberty Park. He emphasizes, "Of course, we always need volunteers." There is room at the station for seven more, which would ease the load on the current rescuers. "You never know (if you could handle the job) until you try."

Besides the satisfaction of helping others, department members are like a family. "You put your life in their hands and they put their lives in yours. That creates a tighter bond."

The volunteers meet twice a month, plus see each other at the station 10 to 15 more times when alarms are sounded. "Most of these guys are really close friends," socializing after work and cheering together for their kids on football fields.

Persons interested in becoming a firefighter or emergency medical technician should call Todd Schutte at 934-2230.

Debbie Blank can be contacted at 812-934-4343, Ext. 113; or debbie.blank@batesvilleheraldtribune.com.

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Photos



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THE PAPER

Hoosiers should use caution in flooded areas

INDIANAPOLIS - With expected heavy rainfall and the possibility of flooding, the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS), Indiana State Police (ISP) and Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) encourage Hoosiers to practice extreme caution while traveling along area roadways with standing water.

If you are driving during a flood it is important to be cautious. Roads may be washed out, unexpected potholes could be covered in water, and your car could float away in only a foot of water. If you must drive during a flood, you are encouraged to follow these tips:

- Do not drive through flooded areas. If you see a flooded-out roadway ahead, turn around and find another route to get to your destination.
- If there is no other route, proceed to higher ground and wait for the waters to subside.
- Even if the water appears shallow enough to cross, do not attempt to cross a flooded road.
- Water can conceal dips, or worse, floodwaters can damage roadways, washing away the entire road surface and a significant amount of ground.
- Remember, 6 inches of water will reach the bottom of most passenger cars, causing loss of control or possible stalling.
- One foot of water will float many vehicles.
- Two feet of rushing water can carry away most vehicles, including SUV's and pick-ups.
- If your car stalls, abandon it immediately and climb to higher ground.

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October 8, 2009

Grant will help Franklin buy flood-damaged homes

Federal grant will pay for 75% of program to help homeowners

*By Jason Thomas
jason.thomas@indystar.com*

Relief could be near for a group of Franklin residents whose homes sustained severe damage in floods two summers ago.

State officials will give the city a check of nearly \$5 million in federal funding to buy 75 homes ruined in the June 2008 disaster.

The money will be presented during a ceremony at 7 p.m. today at the Artcraft Theatre, 57 N. Main St., Franklin.

"I am very excited," Joanna Myers, a senior planner with Franklin and the city's flood plain administrator, said about the process that began with a public meeting July 3, 2008. "It's going to be a good thing for the homeowners and the city."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, through the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, released more than \$4.92 million from the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program two weeks ago to acquire up to 75 homes.

FEMA will fund 75 percent of the project's cost; a Community Development block grant through the Indiana Department of Commerce will cover the city's 25 percent share, which totals \$1.64 million.

While the funding has been approved, there is still much work to be done.

Two appraisals will be conducted on each home, and the average of the appraisals will be used to determine the home's fair market value pre-flood.

Any money the homeowner received through insurance or FEMA funding that went unspent will be deducted from the appraisal, and that would be the offer price.

The homeowner would be given time to mull the offer; if it is accepted, the city would order title work and buy the home.

City officials would like to buy homes before the end of the year, according to Myers. In its paperwork for federal funding, the city gave a timeline of 42 months from start to finish for the grant.

The homes would be demolished and the area would be returned to open space, which could help with emergency response should floodwaters return, Myers said.

"We won't need to respond to that area," she said. "Our emergency response will be safer because we won't be in that area that is prone to flooding."

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