Assessing Vulnerability of New York City Public Housing Residents and Infrastructure to a Hurricane

Earth Institute Climate Change Adaptation Initiative
Columbia University, New York
Student Researcher: Jose Ernesto Melara
Student Advisor: Kye Mesa Barnard, MIA ’09
Principal Investigator: Adam Sobel, Ph.D.

Preliminary Considerations:

New York City’s Housing Authority Serves 633,637 residents as of October 2008 – approximately 5% of the city’s population (NYCHA factsheet, 12/15/08). As studies have indicated that New York City is slowly but gradually becoming more vulnerable to being struck by a hurricane due to climate change impacts, identifying vulnerable populations and infrastructure becomes increasingly important.

Study Question Samples:

Are public housing residents any more vulnerable to hurricane risk than residents in market-rate housing?

What are NYCHA and the New York City Office of Emergency Management’s obligations to the city’s public housing residents with regard to evacuations and recovery of infrastructure services in the event of a hurricane?

Are NYCHA and OEM’s disaster management plans internally consistent?

Does NYCHA have a post-hurricane business continuity plan in place with (privatized) utility companies to ensure that damaged water and sanitation services are promptly recovered?

Study Midpoint Findings:

Sufficient data to claim higher vulnerability of public housing residents and infrastructure as compared to market rate housing and residents has not yet been acquired due to issues regarding access to information. A request of access to NYCHA’s emergency procedures under the provision of the Freedom of Information Act will be filed.

NYCHA’s Emergency Management Procedure (EPM) plan OEM’s disaster mitigation plan are not internally consistent.*

NYCHA does not have a post-hurricane business continuity plan in place with utility companies as of March 2009. *

*Source: interview with officials from NYCHA Emergency Services Division, March 22, 2009.