

New Building Codes Support Puerto Rico in Building Back Stronger

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GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico – The Government of Puerto Rico’s adoption of new building codes marks a major milestone in the island’s recovery—and sets in motion a roadmap that leads to a safer, stronger and more resilient Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico’s 2018 building code represents the first significant revision since 2011. The codes include hazard resistant provisions that provide for safer construction in all of the island’s 78 municipalities.

FEMA provided funding for the building code update through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

The new codes are more current than the codes currently observed by most mainland states. The codes also follow uses in the 2018 International Building Codes, the model codes and standards used to construct safe, sustainable, affordable and resilient structures. They form the basis for laws and regulations affecting communities in the U.S. and worldwide.

With assistance from FEMA, the new codes were developed by Puerto Rico’s Office of Permit Management, public agencies and members from Puerto Rico’s College of Engineers and Surveyors, the College of Architects and Landscape Architects, the General Contractors Association and the Builders Association. Public comment was also considered as the codes were updated.



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“The Government of Puerto Rico received \$79 million from FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to improve code enforcement,” FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer Mike Byrne said. “This HMGP grant enables the Puerto Rico Planning Board and the Office of Permit Management to grow their staff of 11 code compliance officers to more than 200. Safer, stronger communities emerge from disasters like Hurricane María better prepared and less reliant on financial assistance.”

State of the art designs pertaining to wind speeds are the most remarkable aspect of Puerto Rico’s 2018 construction codes. The codes contain 316 wind microzone maps specific to every Puerto Rico municipality. The maps enable builders to customize designs with features that increase a structure’s resilience, safeguarding lives, protecting property and making the island “safer, stronger, and more resilient,” Gov. Ricardo Rossello said.

The code enforcement and code update projects modernize Puerto Rico’s building design and regulation practices. The projects represent a small part of the \$3 billion in hazard mitigation grant funding made available to Puerto Rico during recovery to reduce the risk of loss of life and property from the next disaster.

The benefits of a strong, modern building code in concert with comprehensive enforcement practices have been documented following previous disasters. The adoption of updated building codes in Puerto Rico and the enforcement of those codes are sure to make communities safer from disasters.

To view observations made by FEMA’s Mitigation Assessment Team—experts in post-disaster building assessment—go online to www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/158123.



Access the 2018 construction codes and microzone maps at <http://jp.pr.gov/Codigo-de-Construccion>.

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