

Hazard Mitigation Saves Millions for Rural Community

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Jayuya, Puerto Rico – It is unwise to do the same thing repeatedly and expect different results. This applies to just about everything in life, including how we recover from the damaging effects of a natural disaster.

FEMA has seen many communities struggle with recurring damage when restoring bridges, roads and infrastructure projects. Those who suffer the most are the survivors, who must bear the brunt of having their daily lives upended by blocked roads and lengthy detours.

Municipal Road 527, located in Barrio Veguitas, Sector Gripiñas, in Jayuya (pronounced *Ha-ju-jah*), is an example of how FEMA successfully implemented a hazard mitigation proposal that withstood the onslaught of Hurricane Fiona with resounding success and avoided recurring damage.

Jayuya is an agricultural town located along the highest peaks of Puerto Rico, famous for its rich, aromatic coffee. When Hurricane María made land fall in 2017, torrential rainfall and high-speed winds devastated this community, causing landslides and asphalt surface washout. A sizable segment of Road 527 collapsed downhill. At the time of the disaster, Municipal Road 527 lacked facilities that could direct run-off water from the asphalt road and prevent damage.

“After hurricane María, only 10 percent of the road remained. It was blocked for a long time until we cleared the road with machinery so people could have provisional access, with 4X4 vehicles,” said Jorge González Otero, Mayor of Jayuya.

Hurricane María was not the first disaster to cause damage to Municipal Road 527, said Mayor González. In 1998 Hurricane Georges also devastated many roads and disrupted the lives of those who live in this area.



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To break the damage-repair-damage cycle, FEMA's HM program proposed upgrading this construction project with a mitigation component that would collect and safely divert running water.

"This project is very resilient, it passed the test," said Mayor González. "Over 20 inches of rain fell over here during hurricane Fiona, and you can see that the project is intact. It didn't suffer any damage. This means that it collected the water, relocated it and dumped it in a safe place."

The construction project was awarded to the contractor for \$1,000,100. This amount included about \$77,700 for mitigation works, said Jayuya Municipal Administrator Adrián Bennet Rodríguez. However, the benefit to the municipality and the community was well beyond this amount.

"If it had not been mitigated, the loss would have been the same amount plus the cost of materials and labor. This means that we saved about \$2 million," said Mayor González. "But the most important thing is the service to the community, because we are here to serve the community."

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