



MAKING A
DIFFERENCE
WHERE YOU
NEED US

HELPING COLORADO RECOVER FROM UNPRECEDENTED FLOOD DAMAGE

Disaster can strike at any moment, and unfortunately in September 2013, floods that the National Weather Service described as “biblical,” hit Colorado along the Eastern Rocky Mountains and across the Front Range. In some parts of Boulder, Weld and Larimer County, more than 20 inches of rain fell—stunning a region that usually receives on average, two inches of rain for the entire month of September.¹ In all, flood conditions spread across 17 counties damaging approximately 18,000 buildings, and forcing 11,750 people to evacuate their homes according to the Colorado Office for Emergency Management.² The flood also washed out hundreds of miles of roads and left many small mountain towns completely cut-off. With more than 400 people unaccounted for, nearly 12,000 evacuees and at least 500 shelters set-up throughout the state, the September 2013 floods were without a doubt the worst natural disaster in Colorado so far this century.³

As the rains abated and the water receded, the Colorado sunshine returned, and with it, was a will to recover and rebuild. The effort Colorado wide was phenomenal—there was unprecedented state wide responses and participation. Perhaps Colorado Governor, John Hickenlooper summed it best in a quote for a Denver Post editorial when he said: “our bridges are broken, our roads are broken, our spirits are not broken.”⁴ Rescuers quickly stepped up to serve strangers. Nurses, law enforcement officers, septic system inspectors, engineers,

heavy equipment operators and even county and town managers were being offered to the flood ravaged Front Range.

SAFEBUILT'S ROLE

Equipped with experience in disaster related issues and a strong professional network, SAFEbuilt was eager to spring into action to help aid the impressive and expedient recovery efforts already underway across the state.

SAFEbuilt's Tom Pitchford is chair of the Disaster Mitigation Committee for the Colorado Chapter of the International Code Council. In this role, Tom was responsible for organizing the proper response teams and directing the expert personnel to the affected areas. As a certified instructor on rapid assessment structures, Tom quickly briefed the teams of their goals and what needed to be accomplished before the teams dispatched. Working alongside FEMA and Colorado Chapter ICC members, Tom and other SAFEbuilt employees traveled out into the field to assist in assessing structures and coordinating response inspections. In all, Tom's dispatched volunteer teams totaled 115 people working throughout three counties and seven municipalities.

“In my 30 years of working in building code enforcement I have never seen an organization or state pull together to help jurisdictions in need like the Colorado Chapter of the International Code Council did during and after the flooding,” lauded Tom. “Because of the large number of volunteers, the rapid

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assessment of structures went like clockwork and was completed in record time. Throughout the whole ordeal, I was constantly amazed at how hundreds of CCICC members came together to help their fellow Building Officials.”

HITTING HOME

Two of SAFEbuilt's served communities were hit excessively hard by the flood waters. On September 17th, SAFEbuilt employees were finally able to enter the mountain town of Lyons to assess the damage and determine how much help was needed to accurately and safely inspect the flooded structures. Once again, Tom put a call out to the Colorado ICC chapter asking for additional support. The call was graciously answered by six CCICC inspectors, who together with eight SAFEbuilt employees quickly went to work assessing 172 commercial and residential structures.

The town of Milliken was inaccessible in the days immediately following the flood as bridges and roads were completely washed out. On the day of the flooding, SAFEbuilt Building Official Russ Weber provided Community Development Director Anne Best Johnson with an assessment and reconnaissance plan to implement once the Town was accessible. “I credit the rational and proactive planning to Weber and his team of inspectors.” Johnson added, “It was reassuring to know SAFEbuilt had been through natural disasters before and were there to help us with the initial assessments.” In the weeks following the flood event, many coordination calls were necessary with the State of Colorado Division of Housing regarding the state's regulation on mobile homes. Weber assisted the Town by navigating the State's requirements to develop a streamlined process for residents of the two mobile home parks displaced by the flood. In all, SAFEbuilt inspectors were able to complete 54 structure assessments over the course of two long days.

To help ease the financial strain and enable residents to repair their homes and businesses as quickly as possible, SAFEbuilt waived over \$10,000 in permit and inspection fees in Lyons and Milliken.



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REGAINING NORMALCY

SAFEbuilt embraced the opportunity to play a small part in the recovery efforts, working alongside unbelievable acts of courage and commitment on the local, state, and federal level. The road to recovery has not been an easy one, but progress has been made.

FEMA released the following flood recovery report on October 11, 2013:⁵

- FEMA approved \$43.9 million in individual assistance.
- The Small Business Administrators approved \$29 million in low interest disaster loans.
- FEMA officials said more than 50 national, state and local voluntary and faith-based organizations have spent thousands of hours helping Coloradans recover from the flooding, by providing donations, counseling services, and removal of muck and mold from still-standing homes; as well as by assisting with home repairs, child care and pet care.
- More than 10,500 flood victims have met with local, state, federal, nonprofit and non-government specialists at FEMA's Colorado Disaster Recovery Centers. More than 7,000 Coloradans met with mitigation specialists at those recovery centers and at local hardware stores to learn ways to rebuild structures that'll be more resilient to future storm damages.



The damage and destruction that was caused by the rushing flood water was astounding and eye-opening, but what was even more astounding and eye-opening was the sight of hundreds of thousands of people rushing to help their neighbors. From the vast farmlands in Greeley, to the bustling downtown of Denver, to the snowcapped mountains of Estes Park, Colorado residents rallied behind one another and united to rebuild the streets, bridges, buildings and homes that make up the communities that they are proud to call home.

¹ Amanda Paulson. <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2013/0918/For-Colorado-s-biblical-floods-numbers-tell-astonishing-tale-video>. 18 September 2013

² <http://www.9news.com/news/article/355407/339/Rebuild-likely-to-take-more-than-a-year>

³ The Denver Post Editorial Board. http://www.denverpost.com/editorials/ci_24107674/colorado-floods-recede-will-rebuild

⁴ The Denver Post Editorial Board. http://www.denverpost.com/editorials/ci_24107674/colorado-floods-recede-will-rebuild

⁵ <http://www.fema.gov/news-release/2013/10/11/colorado-flooding-one-month-later-positive-signs-recovery>. 11 October 2013