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# Verboten

“Climate change” is one of the most politically fraught terms in the country right now. It’s hard to find someone who



doesn’t have an opinion on it, and any kind of political discussion involving climate change is likely to end in a stalemate, as each side refuses to accede to the other.

But, as it turns out, some cities are quietly taking measures to protect themselves from the effects of climate change—without ever using the phrase, according to the Associated Press.

From shoring up dams and dikes to using rain gardens to absorb runoff to planting trees to mitigate the urban heat island effect, cities are implementing new practices that plan for an unpredictable future. In many areas, especially those that lean to the far right, city planners speak of “sustainability” or “resiliency” to allow these efforts to move forward without getting bogged down by skepticism; it’s hard to argue that emergency preparedness is a bad idea.

Superstorm Sandy served as a wake up call for officials in every region of the country. In the wake of the storm’s damage, including the 130 people who were killed, government officials at federal, state and local levels began thinking about changes that might prevent a repetition of the widespread devastation Sandy caused, and “resiliency” began to be a buzzword in city planning departments.

The White House announced a series of actions in July to help states and local governments prepare for natural disasters, according to *Governing* magazine. The measures include awarding utilities in eight states a total of \$236 million to

improve rural electrical grids, including nearly \$20 million for rolling out “smart grid” technology; providing drought assistance to parched communities in the West; and expanding disaster relief to include projects that would help minimize damage from future events.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will begin work on a pilot program to prepare communities for future disasters even as they recover from current ones. FEMA also is working on incorporating responses to climate change in states’ required disaster preparedness plans.

The administration also announced it would improve 3-D mapping by the U.S. Geological Survey to help communities better prepare for flooding, coastal erosion, storm surges and water planning, and incorporate planning for climate change in its criteria for \$1.5 million in competitive grants to states and tribes for coastal management programs.

No matter your thoughts on climate change, and whether or not you use that taboo term in discussions, updating infrastructure to be resilient and sustainable is essential to ensuring we are prepared for the future. In this issue, you will find articles on how cities are implementing low impact development to address problems like sewer overflows and pollutants in runoff. The Q&A examines how utilities can lessen the effects of climate change. SWS will continue to cover the movement toward resiliency, and we welcome your comments on how your utility or city is taking steps to mitigate the effects of extreme weather. **SWS**

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