

Changing Climate: How to Prepare for Sea Level Rise

BY ALEX MARTIN



Sea level rise, a pressing climate change-related threat, is projected by NASA and numerous other federal agencies to significantly increase over the next 30 years. A recent interagency report predicts that the sea level along U.S. coastlines will rise 10–12 inches above current levels by 2050. For community associations and their managers along the coast, important discussions and planning must occur now to mitigate against major problems down the line.

To put the 2050 estimate in context, imagine that the king tides that typically occur during the fall in South Florida happen every day. On a positive note, communities still have plenty of time to be proactive and implement all key measures to ensure a bright and safe future. Communities can begin to prepare for sea level rise over the next several decades by communicating and collaborating with local officials, budgeting appropriately, and starting work on repairs now.

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What Communities Can Do to Prepare for Sea Level Rise



COMMUNICATE AND COLLABORATE.

Sea level rise mitigation requires transparent communication between all communities in a coastal area, along with private and public sector collaboration. For instance, certain areas need seawall repairs every 15–20 years, with miles-long stretches of seawall having to be raised 3–5 feet along the way.

One community cannot be on the hook for an entire seawall project—neighbors must hold each other accountable and make sure each community is taking care of its portion of a seawall. When it comes to raising roads in coastal residential areas, members of the public and private sectors should openly communicate to determine the proper angles to raise roads for drainage and related considerations. When a hurricane or major rain event occurs, coastal residential roads must be accessible to emergency personnel.



BUDGET APPROPRIATELY.

Lenders and insurers will require that associations at coastal communities have robust reserves. This is even more paramount at older condominium buildings undergoing a recertification process and applying best practices implemented at newer coastal buildings. That will help avoid burdensome special assessments.

Coastal buildings that are 20–30 years old should reserve funds for regular soil testing and the potential relocation of electrical lines, electrical rooms, and generators from underground parking garages to higher floors.



START WORKING ON THESE REPAIRS NOW.

The coastline is always changing, which puts tremendous pressure on waterfront buildings with underground garages and structure columns on bedrock. These garages should be tested for waterproofing. Check all expansion joint seals to make sure they are up to date. Test sump pumps to verify that they are connected to generators, so seawater is kept out of garages during a storm that knocks out the power.

A control system should be in place with a sump pump or drain that removes water from the bottom of elevator shafts. Native plants are now being used to create barriers that help with surges. In the event of a high tide or major storm, it is helpful to have those elevated barriers in place. The bottom of ground-level doors at coastal buildings often deteriorates. These areas should be painted and sealed properly.

