

Building a Safer Future: Guam Silver Jackets Convene to Address Guam's Flooding Challenges

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Edwin Reyes, Administrator,
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In a significant gathering at the Governor's Conference Room in Adelup on February 8, 2024, Guam's Silver Jackets team, comprising of local and federal agencies, convened to tackle the persistent environmental challenges exacerbated by climate change and natural disasters. The meeting, focused on collaborative strategies

and innovative solutions, highlighted the critical need for cohesive action in the face of escalating environmental impacts.

Matthew Santos, Deputy Director of the Guam Bureau of Statistics and Plans (BSP), alongside Edwin Reyes, Guam Coastal Management Program (GCMP) Administrator, and Mike Terlaje, United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Civil Works Program Manager, kicked off the meeting with welcoming remarks, setting a collaborative tone. The necessity to reassess priorities post-COVID-19 and Typhoon Mawar disruptions was underscored, with a call to evaluate the relevance of ongoing initiatives and to strategize on enhancing the vital work of the Silver Jackets team.

"The last time the Silver Jackets met, we used an approach of developing subcommittees and framed them around certain topics to work on actionable items. We will discuss if the structure is still relevant and create strategies and priorities to enhance the important work everyone is doing," said Reyes.

In a comprehensive review of old business, participants discussed updates on FEMA's Risk Map and Flood Insurance Rate Map. The discussion led by Ron Obispo, Guam Homeland Security State Hazard Mitigation Officer, and Loren Willes, FEMA Integration Team Lead, pointed out updates to ongoing assessments for the map and the minimal changes in firm maps except for an expanded flood zone. The vital role of geographic information system satellite (GIS), used by Matt Santos of BSP to create a Guam flood map, was acknowledged for its effectiveness in identifying flood-prone areas. GIS was noted as an invaluable tool for the varying GovGuam agencies in disaster preparedness effort.



The meeting also shed light on UOG's resource tool, Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN), and asset mapping projects. EDEN leverages the expertise of over 300 delegates and more than 70 institutions to address local community issues, particularly flooding and food waste post-disaster events. The commitment to public outreach and education was emphasized, with the aim of developing a robust program addressing these flood emergency response issues.

Furthermore, the meeting delved into three new USACE Nonstructural Projects: 1) the Guam High Water Mark Campaign, 2) Flood Evaluation Framework Workshops, and 3) Emergency Action Planning Support. These projects provide flood zone signs at ten priority flood zone areas around Guam for motorists, workshops that train users with the 2010 Guam Transportation Stormwater Manual, and tabletop exercises that simulate and support emergency action planning.

During discussions, the member agencies reviewed their completed projects and set targets for 2024, highlighting continuous efforts in disaster preparedness, environmental conservation, and community safety. A recurring theme was the need for a unified approach to tackling post-development flood issues and establishing clear policies.

The Silver Jackets' action-oriented meeting concluded with a firm resolve to continue their collaborative efforts and take a structured approach to addressing the island's flood policy and management issues. For example, clearly defining each agency's role in the event of a flood and leveraging partnerships and resources to prepare for future floods.

The shared commitment to leveraging technology, data, and community outreach to mitigate environmental challenges was evident, marking a forward step in Guam's resilience and sustainable development.

