



**FEMA**

# Best practices

Disaster Mitigation Working in Alaska



## A Moving Story



House reassembled at its new location above the floodplain of the Tanana River.

The ultimate solution to eliminating the risk of being flooded is moving out of the flood-prone area. Although many factors will influence your decision, you could either move to a new home or take your existing home with you. This story tells of one family who chose the latter option.

**Salcha, Alaska** - If you think the house on the property of Robert and Maria Baker along Old Valdez Trail in Salcha used to sit a lot closer to the Tanana River, you'd be right. If you think the house floated to its present position on the floodwaters of the Tanana, guess again. The house was moved to the site in February 2008 through the ingenuity and hard work of the Baker's, their family, and their friends.

To back up a bit, the home of the Olaf Allison family was built at the north end

of the gravel airstrip along Sewell Drive in Salcha, Alaska. The Allison home and several other homes and buildings along Sewell Drive, as well as the roadway and the airstrip, had been inundated to depths as great as 7 feet by floodwaters of the Tanana River several times since development of the subdivision began in the early 1980s. Official records as well as the accounts of the residents indicate that floods in the Sewell Subdivision have increased in frequency and severity in the past decade. Although floods



House section being towed to the new location in February 2008.

have resulted from summer and early fall rainstorms, the most severe and damaging floods were those caused by the backup of water behind ice jams during Fall freeze-up and Spring break-up on the Tanana, which add moving blocks of ice to the debris-laden, fast-rising waters.

During the particularly damaging flood in November 2004, rapidly rising waters left roads, driveways, homes, woodpiles, vehicles, and other personal property encased in a thick layer of ice, and some residents were unable to return to their homes for as long as 10 days. That experience prompted property owners to contact the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) about obtaining some permanent relief from what was becoming an almost annual event. Within the next few months, the FNSB filed an application (with the Alaska Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management) to obtain funding through FEMA's Hazard Mitigation

Grant Program (HMGP) to acquire/purchase the affected properties and relocate the residents.

When the buildings on the acquired properties were made available for sale in 2007, the Bakers purchased the Allison home. Now the real challenge began – the house had to be moved out of the flood-prone area. Robert designed and built a “sled” from 8 inch diameter pipes under the house, which had first been separated into two sections. Each of the sections was braced and secured to the sled and then towed about a mile over and ice- and snow-covered route to the new location, which is considered to be well above the reach of any future floods on the Tanana. While the overall moving project took about a month to complete, towing the house from the original site to the Baker's property took just several hours.

## What is Retrofitting?

Retrofitting means making changes to an existing building to protect it from flooding or other hazards such as high winds and earthquakes.



## What is Relocation?

Relocation means moving your house to higher ground where the exposure to flooding is eliminated altogether.

## More Information

**FEMA publication 312, Homeowner's Guide to Retrofitting: Six Ways To Protect Your House From Flooding**, provides information that will help you decide whether your house is a candidate for retrofitting.

[www.fema.gov/library](http://www.fema.gov/library)

