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Home > Executive order creates new flood requirements for federal projects

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President Obama signed an executive order on January 30 requiring that federal projects be built two feet higher than the previous standard to protect against floods that may worsen as a result of climate change. According to the White House, expanding coastal development and “rising sea levels, intensified storms, and heavy downpours... [contribute] to an increased risk of flooding,” and require greater protection of federal property and taxpayer dollars.

Federal projects have three options to comply with the order: build two feet above the 100-year flood standard, build at the 500-year flood standard, or build to a height determined by “actionable climate science.” The rule applies to new projects, such as roads, bridges, or federal buildings, or infrastructure undergoing significant repair.

Supporters praised the executive order, pointing out that some states, such as Florida and Delaware, already build to the new standard and that the measure is likely to add very little cost to construction while paying off substantially in the future. Opponents feel the order is unnecessary, arguing that the increased construction and design costs outweigh the climate risks perceived by the Administration.

Each federal agency will design a standard to comply with the order following a period of public comment.

Sources: E&E News, the White House
