



VERTICAL DATUM SHIFTS

BACKGROUND

In an effort to lessen the impact of flooding, Congress created the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) in 1968. In partnership with the NFIP, the Georgia Flood Map Modernization Program was created to update the Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) for the entire state and present them in a digital format (resulting in Digital FIRMs, or DFIRMs). One of the main goals of this effort has been to more accurately identify the boundaries of the different flood hazard areas. The limits of these flood hazard areas are based on elevation data. To ensure that all of the elevations used are based on a common reference system, a DFIRM must reference a single vertical datum.

Q What is a Vertical Datum?

A vertical datum is a set of constants that defines a system of comparison of elevations. A vertical datum is important because all elevations need to be referenced to the same system. Otherwise, surveys using different datums would have different elevations for the same point. Historically, the FIRMs have referenced the National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929 (NGVD). As the flood maps are updated in Georgia, they will be based upon the newer North American Vertical Datum of 1988 (NAVD 88).

Q Why is the Vertical Datum Changing?

A datum needs to be updated periodically because geologic changes to the surface of the earth occur; these changes are due to subsidence and uplift or gradual changes in sea level. In addition, the older vertical datum (NGVD 29) was flawed because of erroneous assumptions that mean sea level at different tidal stations represented the same elevation (zero). With the outdated vertical datum, points at 0.0' NGVD 29 have, in fact, different elevations for a variety of reasons. We can now more accurately measure these elevation differences with an expanded geodetic network, further warranting the use of the new vertical datum. The statewide mapping effort provides an opportunity to produce new maps using NAVD 88 and expedite the State's use of the new vertical datum.

Q Why is the Vertical Datum Changing?

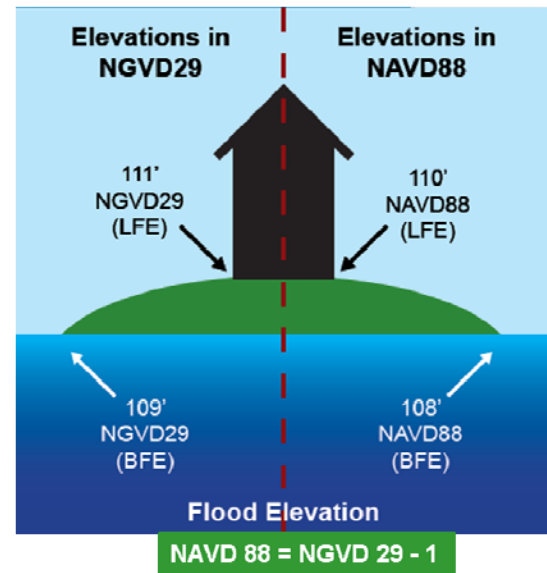
Elevations in NAVD 88 should be used for floodplain management and flood insurance purposes (e.g., elevation certificates, rating using grandfathering rules) the day a new DFIRM using the new datum becomes effective for a county.

Q Who Will be Impacted by the Vertical Datum Change?

This change will be noted by anyone who uses a DFIRM in Georgia, particularly when comparing elevation data on the new DFIRM with data from an old FIRM that was produced using NGVD 29. This applies to insurance agents who may be comparing Base Flood Elevations (BFEs) and Lowest Floor Elevations (LFEs) on older and or newer elevation certificates and comparing them to the previous FIRM or the new DFIRM. The vertical datum changes can impact other stakeholders that work with elevation data, such as engineers and surveyors as well as floodplain administrators across the State.

Q How are the NGVD 29 Elevations Converted to NAVD88?

The difference between the two datums varies from location to location. The exact conversion used will be listed in your Flood Insurance Study test. A datum conversion example is shown. The offset will be applied to the NGVD 29 elevations that are not revised during the creation of a new DFIRM. Where a county boundary and a flooding source with unrevised NGVD29 flood elevations coincide, an individual offset will be calculated and applied during the creation of a DFIRM. The Flood Insurance Study report that supports the new DFIRM will contain information on the conversion of the elevations between NAVD 88 and NGVD 29.



Q Where Can I Get Further Information?

If you have any questions regarding vertical datums changes or mapping changes in general, please contact the FEMA Map Assistance Center at 1-877-FEMA MAP (1-877-336-2627). FEMA also has additional information regarding the implementation of using NAVD 88 at <http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=2247> and an additional fact sheet with more details at <http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=2918>. To obtain current elevation, description, or location information for bench marks in Georgia, visit the National Geodetic Survey's website at www.ngs.noaa.gov. Contact information for additional details about Georgia's Map Modernization Program is below.

For assistance or more information, please contact:

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