



FEMA

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Federal Assistance Before, During & After a Hurricane

Since Irene first threatened the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico last week, we've been posting updates on our blog about our efforts to support our state, local, tribal, and territorial partners. Even before Irene made landfall in Puerto Rico, the federal family was taking proactive steps to ensure assets and personnel were readily available to support the potentially affected areas, as needed.

The bottom line is that meeting the needs of disaster survivors and affected communities after a disaster requires a team effort, and determining the extent of support is done through close coordination with our partners at all levels of government. The emergency management team has begun to assess the damages caused by Irene. These assessments are designed to give the Governor of each State a better picture of damages, and to determine if a request for further federal support is needed.

As the emergency management team begins to assess the damages caused by Irene, we thought it would be helpful to go into detail about some of the more formalized processes that a state follows, in order to request federal assistance for our state, local, and tribal governments:

- **Emergency Declaration** – After a Governor submits a request for an emergency declaration, and prior to formalized damage assessments being done, the President can sign the emergency declaration, as he did for Puerto Rico, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, New Hampshire, and Vermont, in response to Irene. This makes additional federal assistance available to state, local, tribal and territorial communities to support life saving efforts, such as providing shelter to those who had to evacuate their homes. An emergency declaration does not provide federal funding directly to individuals.
- **Damage Assessments** – When the resources from the affected state, local tribal or territorial governments cannot meet the needs of disaster survivors or the affected communities, federal resources are brought in to assist. To determine the level of support needed, we work closely with our partners at every level of government to complete joint damage assessments after a disaster.

These damage assessments are done by combining multiple sources of information, such as aerial surveys, door-to-door evaluations in the affected areas and initial damage reports from state, local and tribal partners. These damage assessments help the Governor determine whether additional federal assistance is needed. Based on the needs, the Governor then makes a formal request to the President, if requesting a major disaster declaration.

An important point to remember is the impact and resources of one state may not be the same as another state, even if the disaster conditions appear similar in nature. Each state's request for an emergency or major disaster declaration is reviewed on its own merit, using the same considerations that are established by federal regulation with the data that was provided by the state.

- **Major Disaster Declaration** – If it is determined that the affected state, territory or tribal government's resources are overwhelmed by the disaster (based off the information from joint damage assessments), a major disaster declaration opens the door for additional federal assistance. The major disaster declaration will designate the programs that are authorized by the President. In Puerto Rico, President Obama has [already made this additional support available](#) following Irene's impact on the island. A major disaster declaration could involve the following assistance programs:
 - **Public Assistance** - provides assistance to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, and certain types of private nonprofit organizations for debris removal, emergency protective measures, and the repair, replacement, or restoration of disaster-damaged, publicly owned facilities. It also encourages protection of damaged public facilities from future events by providing assistance for hazard mitigation measures during the recovery process.
 - **Individual Assistance** – provides assistance to individuals and business owners affected by the disaster. Individual assistance provides funds directly from FEMA, or through Small Business Administration low-interest loans, to fulfill unmet needs such as housing for disaster survivors, disaster unemployment assistance, legal services, crisis counseling, and other disaster-related needs from survivors or small business owners. Often times, individual assistance covers a portion of the uninsured losses of homeowners and business owners.

In addition to these [formalized avenues for federal assistance](#), we proactively deployed Incident Management Assessment Teams, liaison officers, and commodities as Irene threatened the states, tribes, and territories. We will [continue to provide updates on the FEMA blog](#) at <http://blog.fema.gov> as we continue to support all members of the emergency management team as they work to meet the needs of disaster survivors and the affected communities.

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FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

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