
Unit 2: Government Response to a Disaster Declaration



Overview

This section describes how local, State, and Federal governments respond to a disaster and/or a disaster declaration. The topics are:

- Emergency management at the local, State, and Federal levels.
- The disaster response and recovery cycle.
- FEMA's role in managing disasters.

Local Response and Recovery Activities

Local governments are the first line of defense against emergencies and are primarily responsible for managing the response to emergencies and disasters. At the local level of government, the primary responsibility for the protection of citizens belongs to such local elected officials as mayors, city councils, and boards of commissioners.



When a local government receives a warning that an emergency could be imminent, its first priority is to warn citizens and take whatever actions are needed to minimize damage and protect life and property. If necessary, an evacuation may be ordered.

When a disaster occurs, fire, police, medical, and rescue personnel rush to emergency sites to provide aid immediately following the emergency. The local government works to ensure public order and security. Vital services (e.g., water, power, communications, transportation, shelter, and medical care) are provided, and debris removal begins. Public and private utility company crews, along with other emergency teams, begin restoring essential services. In addition, the local government coordinates efforts with local voluntary agencies that assist individuals and families in need.



When a local government responds to an emergency, the level of the response and the types of resources required are determined by several factors, including the:

- Speed of onset of the emergency.
- Potential need for evacuation.
- Magnitude of the situation.
- Projected duration of the event.
- Extent of the threat to the citizens.

In an emergency, the local government is responsible for responding to the event in a way that will contain the emergency, protect people and property, and minimize damage. The local government is also responsible for overall management and coordination of an effective response.

Links to local Emergency Management agencies can be found at <http://www.fema.gov>. Click on Doing Business with FEMA; click on About FEMA; then click on Partners.

State Response and Recovery Efforts

All States have laws that describe the responsibilities of the State government in emergencies and disasters. These laws provide Governors and State agencies with the authority to plan for and carry out the necessary actions to respond to and recover from emergencies. State emergency management legislation describes the duties and powers of the Governor, whose authority includes the power to declare a state of emergency and to decide when to terminate this declaration.

State Emergency Management Offices

Many of the responsibilities to perform and maintain the provisions of emergency management legislation are generally delegated to the State emergency management offices. These offices are organized in a number of ways and have different names. Emergency managers are responsible for preparing for emergencies and coordinating the activation and use of resources controlled by the State government when they are needed to help local governments respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters.

Role of the State Emergency Management Office

In its coordinating role, the State emergency management office is involved in virtually all serious emergencies or disasters. This organization is responsible for receiving the situation reports from local agencies. Based on these and other data, emergency management officials work in consultation with other agency representatives and members of the Governor's staff to determine what types of resources and personnel should be deployed to the affected areas. Using procedures specified in the State Emergency Operations Plan, the State emergency management organization will coordinate deployment of State personnel and resources to the affected areas.



State Resources

When a State emergency is declared, the Governor (or emergency management agency official acting for the Governor) can mobilize the resources of State agencies to provide any necessary assistance. Communities can then use State resources to supplement their own supplies, equipment, and personnel. For example, in a situation in which large populated areas are threatened by the continued rise of flood waters, the State could assist in evacuation of the threatened area by prescribing evacuation routes and helping to control points of entry and departure from the disaster area.

In many States, Governors can suspend State laws or local ordinances if it is determined that the law in question will restrict or prohibit efforts to relieve human suffering caused by the disaster. In some States, after a State emergency declaration, the Governor may establish economic controls over such resources and services as food, wages, clothing, and shelter in the affected area.



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Under a State emergency declaration, Governors are empowered to mobilize the National Guard and direct its efforts. Generally, Governors are granted the power to use all available State resources needed to respond effectively and efficiently to the event. The Governor is able to draw upon the resources, expertise, and knowledge of State agencies as needed to assist in the effort. In many disasters, the States can provide technical assistance and resources that would not be available to most local officials within their own communities.

Federal Disaster Assistance: Non-Stafford Act

As noted previously, certain types of Federal disaster assistance are available even when the President does not issue a major disaster or emergency declaration. Federal agencies, including the Corps of Engineers, the Department of Agriculture, and the Small Business Administration, provide a variety of programs for disaster assistance.

The Disaster Response Process

When a disaster or emergency occurs, local, State, and Federal governments, as well as voluntary agencies, respond immediately. This collective response follows a step-by-step process that has been developed and revised through legislation and through lessons learned in previous disasters. (See pages 2-9 through 2-11 for a detailed description of the Disaster Response and Recovery Process.)

The following are the basic steps of the disaster response process:

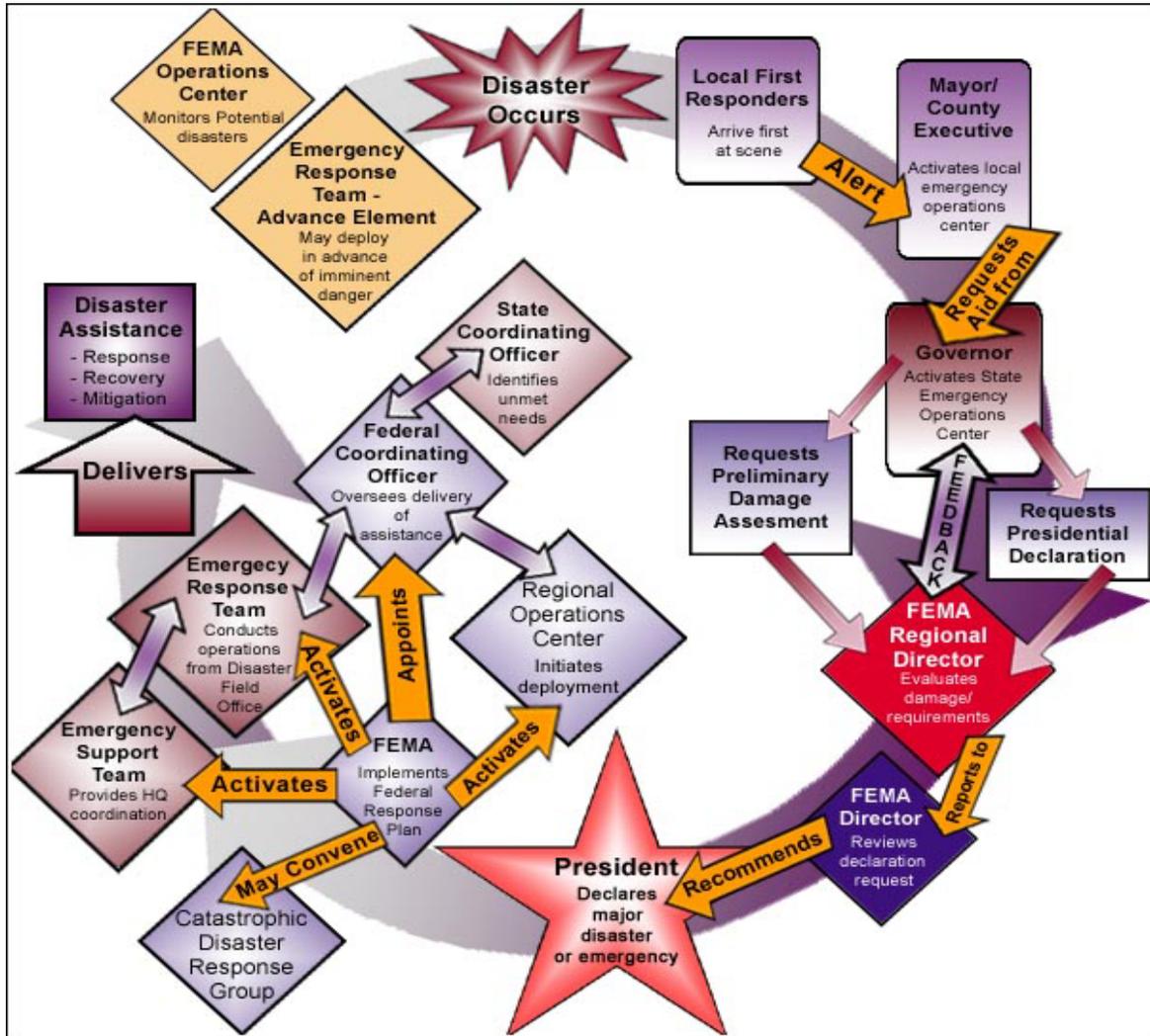
Step 1: A disaster or emergency occurs.

Step 2: Local and State governments activate their Emergency Response Plans and Emergency Operations Centers.

Step 3: State requests a joint Federal, State and local government PDA.

Based on the results of the joint PDA, the Governor may request a disaster declaration after these steps are taken.

Overview of a Disaster Operation



The Declaration Process

Let's take a closer look at the declaration process. There are four steps in this process:

Step 1. A joint FEMA/State Preliminary Damage Assessment

Step 2. The Governor's request for assistance

Step 3. FEMA's recommendation to the President regarding the request

Step 4. The Presidential Declaration

- Step 1. A joint FEMA/State Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA).** FEMA and State representatives complete a PDA. This step involves an inspection of the area to document the impact of the event and to make an initial estimate of the dollar amount of the damage. This assessment establishes a foundation for any request for assistance that the Governor may decide to make and provides estimates on the types of disaster assistance needed. It also provides background for FEMA's analysis of the recommendations on the request and supplies information that will be helpful to those who will manage the recovery operation.
- Step 2. The Governor's request for assistance.** This request, by law, must state that the Governor has taken appropriate action and directed execution of the State Emergency Operations Plan. The Governor must certify that the incident is of such severity and magnitude that State and local resources are inadequate. It must also include a damage estimate, describe the State and local resources committed to response and recovery, describe the assistance being requested, and agree to cost share.
- Step 3. FEMA's recommendation to the President regarding the request.** The Governor's request is addressed to the President through the FEMA Regional Director. The Regional Office transmits the request to FEMA Headquarters along with an analysis and recommendation. The request is reviewed by FEMA Headquarters staff to ensure that it meets all the requirements of the Stafford Act. FEMA's Director then recommends a course of action to the President, and the request is hand carried to the White House.

Step 4. The Presidential Declaration. After a White House review, the President decides whether to declare that a major disaster exists, thereby making assistance available under the Stafford Act. The FEMA Director designates a Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) to oversee the disaster operations.

Under normal circumstances, this process may take several days; however, in cases where an immediate Federal response is needed to save lives or protect public health and safety, an expedited disaster request may start the process within hours.



After the President declares a major disaster, the FEMA-State Agreement is signed by the FEMA Regional Director and the Governor. This agreement establishes the period of the incident, identifies the types of assistance to be provided, lists the areas eligible for

assistance, sets forth the agreed-upon cost-share provisions, and describes other terms and conditions.

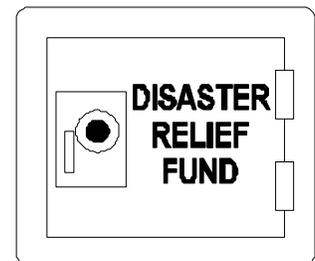
FEMA's Role in Managing Disasters

Once the President declares a Federal emergency or disaster, FEMA assumes several roles in the disaster recovery process, which include the following:

- Helping State governments in requesting additional types of disaster assistance or adding counties to the declaration.
- Evaluating requests for additional assistance.
- Making recommendations to the Executive Associate Director.
- Implementing disaster assistance programs.
- Coordinating the delivery of Federal assistance from Federal agencies and voluntary organizations under the Federal Response Plan.
- Continuing to manage the President's Disaster Relief Fund.

Summary

The table on the following pages summarizes the major events in the disaster declaration process and initial response activities.



Anatomy of a Disaster Declaration

The following table provides basic information about the disaster declaration process and initial response activities. It should be noted that in catastrophic situations or disasters of national interest, the process can be expedited.

<p>Incident</p>	<p>The incident is the event causing widespread destruction or losses that may trigger a disaster declaration. This event may be a flood, fire, hurricane, or other event as specified in the Stafford Act.</p> <p>While the event may be considered a disaster in a given area, no FEMA recovery programs may be implemented until the President signs a disaster declaration. Not all incidents result in Presidential declarations. According to the Stafford Act, response to the incident must be beyond the combined capability of local and State governments to qualify for a declaration.</p>
<p>Initial Federal Response</p>	<p>The Regional Support Team (RST) is activated. Staff is deployed to the Regional Operations Center (ROC) either at the Regional Office or Federal Regional Center to provide technical assistance and coordinate with the State. (Note: The ROC may be staffed before an incident occurs; e.g., a hurricane.)</p> <p>The Emergency Response Team—Advance Element (ERT-A) may deploy to the State before a Presidential declaration.</p> <p>The Emergency Support Team (EST) may be activated at FEMA Headquarters depending on the projected scope and potential impacts. Either a full EST with all Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) or only a partial EST including only a limited number of functions may be activated. With a limited EST, the Information and Planning Function (ESF-5) will most likely be activated to generate Situation Reports (SitReps) and other documents. (Note: The EST may be staffed before an incident; e.g., a hurricane.)</p> <p>The National Emergency Response Team (ERT-N) will be deployed from FEMA Headquarters by the Director of FEMA in catastrophic situations, providing staff to direct the response in support of State and FEMA regional resources.</p>

<p>Preliminary Damage Assessments</p>	<p>The State asks FEMA, through the Regional Office, to participate in a PDA. The PDA identifies the potential need for Individual Assistance, Public Assistance, or Hazard Mitigation. Teams consisting of representatives from FEMA, the State, local governments, and other Federal or State agencies (as appropriate) review the impact on individuals and public facilities.</p> <p>PDA findings are used as the basis for the Governor’s request and also are used by FEMA to evaluate the request and develop recommendations.</p> <p><i>In catastrophic or severe situations, the Governor’s request may be submitted to FEMA prior to the PDA.</i></p>
<p>Governor’s Request</p>	<p>The Governor may request a major disaster declaration based on a determination by the State that the response is beyond the financial or operational capabilities of both the local and the State governments. The request is submitted through FEMA to the President.</p> <p><i>Once a request is received, it is considered “in process” until a determination is made by the President. This process can take a matter of hours in a catastrophic situation or several days, depending on the situation.</i></p>
<p>Regional Summary/ Regional Analysis and Recommendation</p>	<p>FEMA prepares the Regional Summary and the Regional Analysis and Recommendation after a request for a disaster declaration is received from the Governor and the PDA is completed.</p> <p>These documents outline the scope of the losses and make recommendations as to the needs of the disaster-affected area. The FEMA Director reviews these documents and forwards a recommendation to the President. Neither are public documents.</p>

<p>Presidential Disaster Declaration</p>	<p>If the situation is of significant severity and magnitude to warrant a major disaster or an emergency declaration, the President signs the declaration. If, after careful review by FEMA and the White House, the situation does not meet the standards established by the Stafford Act, a request may be denied. A letter explaining the denial is sent to the Governor by the Director of FEMA. States have the right to appeal.</p> <p>When a disaster is declared, the scope of the assistance programs identified by the President and the affected counties is designated by the Director of FEMA. The FEMA Director appoints a Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) to direct the Federal response and recovery activities. If requested by the Governor or the Governor’s Authorized Representative, additional counties may be added to the declaration, if warranted.</p>
<p>Disaster Field Office Established</p>	<p>The DFO is established within 48 hours of the declaration to provide a base of operations for Federal and State agencies involved in the response and recovery activities. (The DFO is covered in detail in the next unit of this course.)</p>
<p>FEMA/State Agreement</p>	<p>The FEMA/State Agreement details the terms under which Federal aid is granted, including any cost-sharing provisions. This document is signed by the Governor and the FEMA Regional Director. The FCO may amend this agreement. Examples of amendments include the addition of other counties to the declaration or establishment of an end date for the incident period (if it was not determined at the onset of the disaster).</p>
<p>Federal/State Meeting</p>	<p>This meeting involves representatives from all Federal, State, and voluntary agencies offering programs for people and communities affected by the disaster. The programs are explained to the State during this meeting.</p>