



GEMA

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PUBLIC ASSISTANCE HELPS LOCAL GOVERNMENTS RECOVER FROM DISASTER

ATLANTA – Severe storms and tornadoes threaten more than homes. They can damage or destroy bridges, highways, public buildings, parks, hospitals and water treatment plants – not to mention leave tons of debris or disrupt communications and emergency services.

In addition to the many assistance programs available to help people recover from the 20 deadly tornadoes that rolled across Georgia May 11 - 12, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers a helping hand to communities, county and state agencies and some private non-profit organizations that suffered storm and tornado damage.

“By helping local and state governments and looking for ways to reduce future damages, state and federal disaster assistance has an impact on every individual in those communities,” explained Jeff Bryant, FEMA federal coordinating officer in charge of this disaster.

Under the Presidential disaster declaration of May 23, public assistance (infrastructure) is available to local governments in Bibb, Carroll, Crawford, Emanuel, Glynn, Jefferson, Jenkins, Johnson, Laurens, McIntosh, Treutlen, Twiggs, and Wilkinson counties, and hazard mitigation is available statewide.

The Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA), which administers the Public Assistance program, has briefed local officials in these counties on the assistance available and how to apply.

“Many community officials in the 13 counties declared as eligible disaster areas have indicated an interest in this program that will help restore damaged infrastructure or foot some of the expense to their taxpayers for removing debris,” said Joe McKinney, deputy state coordinating officer.

Federal, state and local teams have been inspecting all disaster-related damage, examining expenses identified by the state or local representatives, and preparing reports that outline the scope of repair work needed and the estimated restoration cost.

For projects that are eventually approved, FEMA will typically pay 75 percent of the cost. These projects may include such things as debris removal, emergency services related to the tornadoes, and repairing or replacing damaged public facilities. The latter category includes eligible schools, libraries and other public buildings, and repairing roads, bridges, water control facilities, utilities and recreational facilities.

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Private non-profit organizations may qualify for assistance to restore certain types of facilities that include educational, utility, emergency, medical, custodial care and other facilities that provide essential government types of services.

Another assistance program, Hazard Mitigation, identifies areas where local or state governments can prevent or reduce damages in future storms, tornadoes and flooding. This may take the form of flood-proofing; moving, rebuilding or strengthening structures; lining ditches; building bigger culverts; redesigning bridges to withstand greater flows or repairing roads or public buildings or utilities.

State and local governments work together to search out projects where hazard mitigation programs can be most useful, cost effective, and have the greatest impact. All the projects submitted are reviewed by an interagency steering committee made up of representatives from state and federal agencies. The projects are administered by GEMA. For projects chosen, 75 percent funding comes from FEMA's Hazard Mitigation program.

FEMA coordinates the federal government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from all domestic disasters, whether natural or man-made, including acts of terror.

Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-FEMA (3362). For TTY call 800-462-7585.

SBA's disaster loans are the primary form of federal assistance for non-farm, private sector disaster losses. Disaster loans from SBA helps homeowners, renters, businesses of all sizes, and nonprofit organizations fund repair and replacement of disaster damaged real and personal property. These disaster loans cover uninsured and uncompensated losses and do not duplicate benefits of other agencies or organizations. For information about SBA programs, applicants may call 800-659-2955 or online at www.sba.gov.

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For more information on Georgia's disaster recovery, visit www.fema.gov or www.gema.ga.gov or www.georgia911.org